A WOMAN
ALONE

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THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF

A WOMAN ALONE

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NEW YORK AND LONDON
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1911

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Published September, 1911

Printed in the United States of America

NOTE

THIS BOOK IS NOT A NOVEL, BUT A RECORD OF THE ACTUAL EXPERIENCES OF THE WOMAN WHO IS THE NARRATOR

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THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN ALONE

CHAPTER I

BEREFT

MY father died when I was five years old, and when the sister, whom I shall call Alison, was two. Mother, always in poor health, was left with very little means. In the adjoining village lived Dr. and Mrs. Coles, a childless couple, who were first cousins as well as man and wife. Before her marriage, my mother had taught school in that village, and boarded in their home. Hearing now of her bereavement, they came to see her. They saw her children, too, and Alison's beauty and winsomeness made conquest at first sight. After that, Mrs. Coles visited us often, to ease her hunger for the child. But the hunger was not eased that way. It only grew the more.

Finally, she begged that she might take the baby home with her—"at least for a visit," she pleaded, picturing to my mother the loneliness of herself and Dr. Coles. "And you have been blessed with *two* little ones," she said. Later on, she tactfully referred to my mother's straitened circumstances and poor health as heavy handicaps in the upbringing even of one child. How, then, could she provide for two? Even so, would she be doing right to deprive the baby of the greater advantages

which Dr. and Mrs. Coles could give? "Alison is an unusual child," she urged. "She deserves unusual opportunities. With us she would have the best of everything."

The starved maternal love of the physician's wife taught her what to say—what, too, to leave unsaid. There were long pauses, and both women wept. On the floor beside them, the children played with the new toys Mrs. Coles had brought. Suddenly the baby, exploring the mysteries of a train of cars, hurt her finger and cried lustily. Mrs. Coles sprang forward, caught her in her arms, and, crooning comfort, kissed the place to make it well. Then, with the child clinging to her, she turned to my mother.

"I couldn't love her better if she were my very own. Mayn't I have her?" she implored. "Mayn't I?"

Alison, frightened by the seriousness in the voice which but just now was murmuring caresses, wound her arms the tighter round the woman's neck. "Mamma—mamma—mamma," she cried.

Mrs. Coles in solemn triumph looked at my mother. "The baby herself has spoken, dear friend. Let her decision stand."

But my mother only shook her head. "I don't know. I can see but one step at a time. You may take her home with you to-day for a visit—a *visit*—if you wish."

Scarcely was that visit entered on, when another change occurred. My mother's state of health, never satisfactory at best, became so alarming that, with the older child, she withdrew to her father's home, a hundred miles away. This, too, was called a visit, and at her departure she spoke of returning "in the spring"; but neighbors, who ran in to bid her godspeed on the journey, have told me that she looked like death that day, and not one of them expected to see her there again.

Mrs. Coles wrote frequently, and her letters glowed with accounts of Alison. The baby's rosiness was por-

trayed and her cute sayings were recorded faithfully, while, in itemizing her raiment and the playthings in her nursery, Mrs. Coles's communications rivaled the completeness of a catalogue. In addition, my mother's correspondent dwelt on the joyous transformation wrought for herself and Dr. Coles by the presence of "the wee one"—as she always called her—in their home, and on accounts of the baby's happiness in her new environment. "She has never cried once," was the invariable report.

Then, suddenly, the letters changed to bulletins. Alison was ill with membranous croup. For my mother to go to her was impossible—she was herself prostrated by disease. Even had it been otherwise, Mrs. Coles declared that her coming could be of no avail. Everything was being done that professional skill could do, reinforced by love. Dr. Coles—a physician held in high repute throughout the countryside—had given his other patients into the care of his colleague in order to devote himself entirely to the case in his own home, two trained nurses were in attendance, and Mrs. Coles herself, she wrote, never left the baby day or night.

When the crisis passed, my mother was given to understand that, humanly speaking, it was owing only to this care that the little life was saved. Friends of the Coleses, who also knew my mother, wrote that Alison's case was said to be one of the most serious on record, and that her recovery was everywhere considered to be little short of miraculous. Then my mother felt that, in any event, the child belonged less to her than to Dr. and Mrs. Coles. This was in February. In March, they legally adopted her. In May, my mother died.

CHAPTER II

THE BREAK WITH GRANDFATHER

THEN I entered on dark days. Too young to realize the deeper meaning of my loss, I still missed my mother grievously—missed the creature comforts her hand had prepared, and the careful undoing of the tangles in the mass of curls through which a great-aunt's comb now dragged itself relentlessly—missed the tucking into bed of nights, and the daily companionship of her who even till the last was never too weary to listen to the prattle of a chatterbox. Grandfather was an austere man, and the spinster sister who presided over his household shared his belief that children should be seen, not heard.

Even so grandfather eyed me with stern disfavor from the first because of my striking resemblance to my father who had defied him years before; who, when forbidden to set foot inside the house, met the only daughter secretly and persuaded her to a runaway marriage with himself, whom grandfather styled "the scapegrace son of a land-poor aristocrat." The "scapegrace" part of it was false, but my father did trace his descent through long lines of distinguished names. Mother's father, on the other hand, conscious of humble origin, affected to despise this lineage, and nursed resentment against the marriage which, offending only his prejudice, left unfilled his prophecy. Information of my birth and Alison's was unacknowledged. He refused to attend my father's funeral, but indicated his willingness to receive the widowed daughter in his home. If my mother cherished any hope

beforehand that the child who accompanied her would further the entire reconciliation for which she longed, that hope was banished at grandfather's first sight of me. Mother cared for me the more because I was so like my father. For that very resemblance grandfather hated me. Understanding this, she then kept me away from him as much as possible. After her death I soon discovered why.

At first, with the spontaneity of the child of love, who wants to be friends with every one, I ran to meet him halfway down the hill after watching long at the window for a glimpse of him on his homecoming at the close of day. The rebuff I met, instead, marked the dawning of self-consciousness. My resentment, too, was roused by the tone of his frequent reference to my father in conversations with Aunt Jane, which he may have thought me far too young to comprehend.

Aunt Jane herself, under the lifelong domination of grandfather's iron will, was only a degree less stern, though I am sure she never meant to be unkind. But it was a long time since she was a little girl, and the language of childhood—language whose most significant utterance is often found in its silences—was foreign to her now, and there had been nothing in the experience of the intervening years to serve her as interpreter. Then, too, it was hard at her age to be burdened with responsibility for the training of a child. But there was nobody else. My father, like my mother, had no brothers or sisters, and neither of his parents was alive.

Aunt Jane I never loved, but time has somewhat softened now the harsh outline of her; and, looking down the vista of past years through more discerning eyes than first regarded her, I see only a woman who did her duty according to her light. Any one dependent on grandfather deserved much sympathy. In addition I owe her gratitude, for besides starting my feet on the established paths of rectitude, she often mitigated, in a frigid fashion

of her own, grandfather's severity. It is all so long ago —the lonely childhood in the silent, grim old house— that it might almost seem to me the chance-seen picture of another's early life, save that in the woman who writes this lives the logical survivor of the child who, growing up in that atmosphere of repression, walked softly all the day, and cried herself to sleep at night.

But the atmosphere of repression stifles soon or late, and then comes the life-or-death struggle for fresh air. At fifteen, I justified my heritage—I defied my grandfather. Soon after my graduation from the village high school, grandfather sent for me to join him in the sitting-room. It was a chilly evening in a northern New England June. I found him standing by the chimney-piece warming his hands at the fire in the grate. He curtly informed me that having now finished school, I was hereafter to help him in the factory. For many years he had owned a woolen mill, and in the old days had carded rólls and woven cloth for all the countryside; but times had changed, capital and enterprise had broken in, and competition was fast crowding him to the wall, hampered as he was by antiquated machinery, small equipment, and business methods utterly inadequate to the altered conditions of the day. Ignoring facts, grandfather laid the blame on the bookkeeper.

"The fellow's been robbing me for years," he said. "However, I'll turn him off, and put you in his place. You are fairly intelligent for a girl, and have some head for figures, so I can teach you my way of doing business. Be ready to-morrow morning at half-past six. That's all." With a gesture of dismissal, he began to poke the fire.

I drew a long breath. "No, sir, it isn't all," said I.

Grandfather turned abruptly from the hearth and looked at me. As my eyes did not falter before his frown, his jaw tightened ominously. Finally he spoke.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I shall never set foot in your factory. I'm going to the University of Manchester."

Grandfather's opinion that a "college education" was a waste of money and of time was well known to me. Consequently, his next words held for me no surprise. "You can't go without money, and I won't give you one cent. You've been kept at school already far too long, and you've cost me more now than your mother ever did."

Then I freed my mind of its stored-up bitterness. I told him that I would never take one cent from him, even if on bended knee he craved acceptance as a boon; that his bread had choked me ever since the day I first realized how unwelcome was my presence in his house; that notwithstanding this I had endured existence underneath his roof, and had been subject to his will until such time as I could strike out for myself. That time so eagerly awaited had now come, I said, and added that just as soon as I was able I should pay him with interest at the legal rate for my maintenance thus far.

It was all very young and very theatrical. I forgot that he was an old man, and that his blood flowed in my veins. I forgot everything except that he had made my mother suffer in her youth, that he spoke ill of my father, who, dead, could not defend himself, and that on me he wreaked vengeance for my birth. I hurled at grandfather facts I had stumbled on one day, when, banished to the attic as punishment for sliding down the banister in the lower hall, I whiled the hours away by ransacking the contents of an old hair-covered trunk. Thus learned from a yellowing letter written in my mother's correct Spencerian hand, that she, too, had rebelled against the rigors of the factory, and at eighteen, in order to earn the money he would not give her for tuition at the best known female seminary of her day in that locality, had taught district school. I, too, would teach school, I said, and would graduate in time from the

University of Manchester, to which women were now admitted on the same terms as men. It was my father's alma mater. I would follow in his steps.

Then, out of breath, I sank into a chair and stared across the room at grandfather, who stood motionless, a tall, gaunt figure by the hearth.

"Very well," he answered, in slow decisive tones. "I wash my hands of you. To-morrow morning you will leave this house. You are your father's child."

CHAPTER III

PAWNING MY MOTHER'S WATCH

THE open break with grandfather—as I found out long before I slept that night—had come before I was quite ready for it in the matter of details. All along, I had planned to go to college, not as a student plans, for there was nothing of the student in my make-up; but I had looked forward to entering the University of Manchester as the means of an escape from grandfather, as a stepping-stone to acquaintance with those who had known and valued both my parents, as the first move toward reunion with Alison. She was the only living link between me and a happy past; with her was connected all I longed for in the years to come. Finding the real world so unendurable at grandfather's, I had built up for myself an imaginary world. And it all centered around Alison.

Since my mother's death, there had been no communication from the Coleses, but I often read of them in a weekly newspaper to which grandfather subscribed. They were people of prominence in their village, and were consequently of perennial interest to the social editor. Second only to the Coleses as objects of my weekly search through the columns of that newspaper, was the name of Mrs. Lawton, a woman known to me as one of my mother's old-time friends. Since coming to grandfather's I had never seen her, and my early recollections of her personality were too vague to be dependable; but her name stood out distinctly in memory, and from the newspaper I learned that she was diligent in good works.

I now decided to go to her, and ask her for advice concerning means of self-support while I studied at the university. But how to go? I had no money, and it was too far to walk, when all one's future might depend on making a good impression at the journey's end.

After casting about in many directions unsuccessfully for some way of raising money immediately, my thoughts turned to the one possession which I prized more than all else besides. It was my mother's watch, a quaint timepiece in a case of rare workmanship. My father had given it to her. I remembered now that a schoolmate of mine, whose parents kept her well supplied with pocket money, admired it excessively, and had often begged to borrow it. It had been a long-standing custom, hers and mine, to loan each other "treasures" now and then. The "treasures" would seem simple indeed judged by the school-girl standard of to-day, and even then, gauged by rural reckoning, my supply was very limited. The best that I could muster, exclusive of the watch, was a ribbon or two of unusual design and weave, a bracelet, and a brooch. These I had acquired by stealth, dragging them forth from the attic gloom; and she had taken them home from school with her on various occasions when I in turn succeeded to temporary ownership of treasures from her store. But I was always deaf to petitions for the watch. She hadn't one herself, and, therefore, was perhaps the more covetous of mine. Her parents were indulgent in most matters of her choice, but, for reasons of their own, had not yet given her a watch. At all events she was often hurt by my refusal to loan it to her "just for overnight." It had always seemed to me I could not part with it; but now I saw that to leave the watch with her, was the only feasible means of raising funds at once for journeying to Manchester.

This schoolmate lived near by. Very early in the morning, I went to her and poured into her sympathetic ears the story of my break with grandfather. My re-

solve to start out afoot, alone and penniless, in search of an education—for so it mistakenly appeared to her who knew not the deeper motive of my quest—fired her generous soul. With difficulty I restrained her from rushing pellmell to her parents with a statement of my need. At last, however, I made her understand that all I would accept was an advance of money in return for loaning her the watch against such time as I could redeem it from her hand. Her quarter's allowance had been paid just the day before. She insisted on transferring it to me intact; and, with youthful enthusiasm, she added many roseate predictions of success for me, together with oft-repeated promises that the precious watch should have the best of care.

CHAPTER IV

SETTING OUT FOR COLLEGE

GRANDFATHER I did not see again. Not even such an early riser as himself was stirring when I stole out of the house to confide in my schoolmate; and by the time I was back again, after having purchased a new pair of shoes and after calling at the expressman's on the way, he had long since breakfasted and gone to the factory. What he told Aunt Jane before he went, I never knew, but that he had told her something I recognized at once. Her manner, to be sure, as she waited for me at the breakfast-table showed her usual impassivity, but the waiting was itself significant. By this time, ordinarily, the dishes were all washed. Drawing up a chair, I sat down to the belated meal. She eyed me with her customary apathetic glance, but there was no chiding for my tardiness.

"Aunt Jane," I said, trying to make my voice sound natural, "I'm going to Manchester by the ten o'clock train to-day, and—and I'm not coming back."

She nodded grimly, and turned her attention to the coffee-pot. I said nothing more, but going through the form of breakfast as quickly as I could, fled upstairs to pack. The packing was soon attended to, for all my worldly goods but half filled one small trunk. The expressman, ordered for an early hour, appeared even earlier; and then, the trunk started on its way, I found myself with a full three-quarters of an hour on my hands.

I remember, as distinctly as if it were yesterday, how the moments dragged while in the dismantled chamber I

sat staring at a cheap alarm clock on the mantelpiece. A terrible load would be lifted instantly, I felt, once I was in the train; but it seemed ages till train-time. It was a short distance to the railway station, but there were lions in the path. To be sure grandfather was safely out of range in the factory, but in any case I hated him so utterly that there was no room for fear of him. The schoolmate whose pecuniary aid had made the journey possible had insisted on seeing me off as well, and her home being nearer to the railway station than was grandfather's, I had agreed to call for her. But it was so early that there was no likelihood of her being ready yet; furthermore, I shrank from the questioning of her family if opportunity were given them to voice their curiosity. I even shrank from the dear girl herself, for my own spontaneity had been so repressed that I was keenly apprehensive of her impulsiveness. With the best intention in the world she couldn't keep a secret long, and I wanted to get away before the neighbors knew.

To this train of thought the ticking of the clock kept up monotonous accompaniment, while through it all I was conscious of Aunt Jane's heavy tread on the floor below. It seemed to typify all her harshness and frigidity, and the approaching farewell interview grew every moment more formidable. Although eager to have it over with, I found myself putting it off as long as possible. At last the menace of the minute-hand left me no alternative. With a realization—half joy and half solemnity—that I was descending the staircase for the last time, and careful, too, from habit, to avoid the step that creaked, I made my way down to the sitting-room. Just outside the door I halted, for a final clutch on courage. Everything was still inside. Suddenly the kitchen clock, always ahead of time, began to strike the hour of ten; and thus spurred on, I went into the presence of Aunt Jane. She rose stiffly and laid aside her knitting work.

"I've come to say good-by, Aunt Jane," I murmured, adding awkwardly, "and—thank you for all you've done for me."

She pushed up her spectacles, and gave me a long look. "You have asked no advice about this move," she said at last, "and I shall offer none."

With that I felt myself dismissed, and lost no time in getting out of doors. Half-way down the path to the green gate in the hedge, she ran after me. "Here, child, take this," she whispered, and thrust a five-dollar bill into my hand. Grandfather never allowed her to have money, so her generosity was the more mysterious; but it was not the material gift that broke down my self-control.

For a moment, sobbing, I clung to her. Then, with a vague sense of strangeness, and with some twinges of remorse for causing Aunt Jane embarrassment, I released her, said "thank you" again, and walked hurriedly away. Once I looked back, but Aunt Jane had disappeared.

CHAPTER V

THE PRESIDENT BEFRIENDS ME

THE load *did* lift when I was in the train. Having burned my bridges, the cheering warmth of the conflagration impressed me more than its finality. With every mile of the journey, my spirits rose. I might have been a princess soon to be a queen, setting out on a triumphal progress to a foreign country whose king awaits her coming with all the pomp of royalty and the impatience of young love.

By the ticket in my hand, my destination was the town of Manchester. In my heart I felt that I was going to Alison. Just how I was to reach her, I did not know; for the present it would be enough—if nothing more were possible—to breathe the same air that she breathed, to know the same people, to have similar interests. Of course, I did not think it all out with an analysis of motives and a balancing of probable results. At fifteen we don't pull things to pieces to see how they are made. We take them as they are. Yet, even then the conditions of my life had made me overserious for my years, and I realized there would be hardships to endure. But the mountains of difficulty were all reduced to molehills in advance by the belief that someway, somehow, I was going to the sister I had worshiped from afar.

Arrived at Manchester, I went directly to the Young Woman's Christian Association, whose address I knew from the newspaper I had read for years at grandfather's. The Association maintained a board directory, and through this I secured before nightfall a boarding place.

After supper I set out, intending to introduce myself to Mrs. Lawton, tell her of my break with grandfather, and ask her for advice.

It was vacation now, and the summer hush had settled on the town. Of the Commencement-week festivities I had read but recently, thrilling to the thought that when that season next rolled round, I, too, should be a part of the university. To myself, indeed I seemed already to belong to it, as, in the early evening, beneath the overarching elms of College Street, I climbed the hill and caught my first glimpse of the group of buildings that crowned the summit. For many honored years, the name of my father's family had figured in the annals of the university, and perhaps the deserted aspect of the academic halls as I reverently gazed up at them made me feel the more at home. Untenanted by living occupants they became for me more vividly the haunts of my ancestors. Even the campus wore a familiar air when first I stepped on it. For some time I wandered aimlessly up and down, drinking in my fill of the joy of being there; and then, as naturally as if I had done it all my life, turned aside from the well-traveled circuit of the long way round to the short cut that led diagonally to the residence of Mrs. Lawton.

As the gate clicked behind me, I had a sudden feeling of timidity. All along I had counted on the co-operation of my mother's friend. But perhaps she would regard me as a reckless, headstrong girl to defy my grandfather. She might refuse to have anything to do with me. Slowly I walked up the path, and, after stooping furtively to wipe the dust from my new shoes, mounted the front steps. No one was in sight, and the front door was closed. I rang the bell. Its long reverberation seemed a mockery. After a period of waiting, I rang again. Still there was no response. I went to the side door. That was fastened, too. Half-way to the barn, I met a man who said he was the gardener, and also informed me that

the family had left home three days before for a European trip. Noticing my crestfallen look, he added kindly, "I could give you their address."

The unexpectedness of Mrs. Lawton's absence made me oblivious of all else. I stood silent, lost in thought. Meanwhile the gardener was fumbling through his pockets, and presently produced a piece of paper covered with closely written lines. This paper he held out to me.

"There's such a lot of it—foreign words an' all—that I ain't learned it yet. Read it for yourself."

Then I pulled myself together, thanked the gardener, and told him that Mrs. Lawton's address in Europe was of no use to me. "You say she'll be back early in the fall?"

"When college opens, yes. This burg is a dead one in vacation time. Everybody on the hill goes away."

Then I went back to the campus, sat down on a bench, and took a long look around. Everything bore witness to the gardener's veracity. Not only were the college buildings dark, but the private houses were gloom-enshrouded, too, and the silence in which I had read a welcome earlier, now seemed ominous. Furthermore, night was coming on—not a star was in the sky. The town clock struck the hour; it was later than I thought, and I started up, wondering which way to go. Here and there a street lamp glimmered, and by this guidance, I was slowly making my way on, when all at once, I found myself near a brightly lighted house, and by the long rays streaming from a window, made out the figure of a half-grown boy coming down the path. At the gate he passed me.

"Who lives there?" I asked.

"There?" A backward shift of his thumb emphasized contempt for my ignorance. "Why that's Prexy's house."

"Prexy?" I mused. "What a queer name!"

The boy burst into a laugh. "Oh, it ain't his real name, you know. It's Prexy for short," and he laughed again. "He gets letters that's addressed to President Breen of the University of Manchester."

Even as the boy was speaking, I decided what to do. Without giving myself time to change my mind or to be afraid, I hurried up the path and rang the bell. The president himself answered it. He was a tall man, spare, and a little bent. "Come in, come in," he said, and ushered me into a room whose walls were lined with books.

Much abashed I sank into the first chair I saw. It happened to be an armchair, wide and deep and high. It was very uncomfortable, for my feet didn't reach the floor; but having once chosen it, I was too embarrassed to make another move. So I sat there, far back in its depths, with a hand on each arm-rest.

"And what can I do for you?" asked the president.

"I don't exactly know—" unconsciously I sighed—"but I want to go to college."

The president smiled indulgently. "That's laudable ambition, to be sure! If you hold fast to it through the years of preparation, there's little doubt of your success."

"But, sir, I have finished preparation. I have a diploma from the —— High School."

"Why, bless my soul," he said. "I took you for a child. How old are you, please?"

"Fifteen and a half," said I.

At this he smiled again. "Well, I wasn't so far wrong, after all. And your home?"

"I haven't any home. My name is Dorothy Baldwin."

The president started at the name. I told him who were my father, my great-uncles, and my paternal grandfather. Then he looked long at me, nodding his head a little. "I might have known," he said.

After that it seemed very natural to tell him all about

it—all but Alison. I couldn't bring myself to mention her, and there was no reason why I should: that I was the last survivor of the family name, and that I wanted to work my way through the university, were sufficient for the president. He in turn explained that he was leaving town next day, but that before he went, he would confer with Professor Gryce in regard to giving me some summer work in the college library. Professor Gryce, it seemed, was the librarian, and meant to take advantage of the comparative leisure of vacation time to catalogue a large bequest of books the university had recently received. The task was just begun, but already the president understood more help was needed in the vast amount of routine work entailed; at any rate, he assured me, he would ask Professor Gryce to make a place for me. "Though your name alone would be enough to enlist his interest," the president kindly said. Nor did his kindness stop there. He told me of my father's father, gave me some practical advice about wise expenditure of the small amount of money at my command, and finally, charging me to await some communication from Professor Gryce, sent a servant to escort me to my boarding place.

CHAPTER VI

FIRST NEWS OF MY SISTER

FOLLOWING the president's farewell injunction, I waited for some word from Professor Gryce. For a week I scarcely ventured from the house, lest in my absence the expected summons should arrive and be mislaid. The postman I watched from the moment he first turned into our street till he was lost to sight; messenger boys bound for other houses in the neighborhood I regarded longingly. All without avail.

Every day I counted the money loaned by my schoolmate. At grandfather's it had seemed a large sum indeed, but in Manchester, with expenses springing up on all sides to confront me unawares, it looked very small. To make time pass more rapidly, I tried to study; but I was not naturally studious, and found it impossible to solve equations in algebra while anxiety preyed on my mind. Daily I read the newspaper, but it made no impression after I gleaned, from the columns devoted to affairs in the adjoining village, that Dr. Coles was taking a vacation for the first time in fifteen years, and with Mrs. Coles and their little daughter Alison, had gone to the Yellowstone, and would perhaps visit Alaska before returning home. It seems strange now that I did not sooner investigate matters at the college library, but grandfather and Aunt Jane had trained me to obey implicitly the spoken word. The president had said "Wait." Wait I must.

After ten days, however, I mustered up courage for what seemed to me a heinous act of disobedience. I pre-

sented myself at the desk in the college library, and in a low tone, asked if I might please see Professor Gryce.

The tone was so low that the attendant, a young woman wearing glasses, couldn't hear. "What is it you wish?" she inquired, in a brisk, businesslike manner as she took me in from head to foot. I was small even for my age, and something in her glance implied that this was no place for me. Whereupon I drew myself up to my full height, and endeavored to increase it by remembering that I was a high-school graduate. "I should like to see Professor Gryce," I announced, with dignity.

"Not here," said the attendant. Suddenly my dignity was gone, and I was nothing but an anxious, disappointed girl again, before whose eyes blurred visions of Europe, Alaska, and the Yellowstone. Truly had the gardener said that everybody went away. Still I lingered at the desk, and presently the young woman spoke again.

"Laid up with rheumatism. Be here to-morrow, we expect. Any message?"

"Why—no," I stammered. "I've been looking for a message from *him.* The president said that Professor Gryce would communicate with me."

The attendant shoved toward me an official-looking slip of paper, and pointed to a pen. "Leave your name and address?"

I did so, and within two days received a note from Professor Gryce, explaining that he had just found a letter he had written me more than a week earlier, which through somebody's mistake, had not been mailed. In his enforced absence from the library since that time, he had not been able, he said, to keep in touch with the progress of cataloguing, but until his return he had supposed that I was among those engaged in it. They were behindhand now. Would I report at half-past nine on Wednesday morning, prepared to begin work at once?

Professor Gryce I found to be the gentlest, most con-

siderate of men; under his instruction I soon mastered the routine and performed acceptably the work required of me. The salary was small, but it enabled me to live; and by the time college opened in the fall, I had repaid the money loaned by my schoolmate, and had regained possession of my mother's watch.

Long before that time, I discovered, too, the attitude of the Coleses to me, a discovery for which, in my youth and ignorance, I was wholly unprepared. This is the way it came about:

Miss Ames, one of my fellow-workers in the library, lived in the adjoining village, which was the home of Dr. and Mrs. Coles. One day she told me that in conversation the previous evening she had chanced to speak my name in the hearing of a neighbor. This neighbor, Mrs. Shelling, then questioned Miss Ames, and finally decided that I must be the daughter of "A saint on earth," she called her, whose memory she revered. Accordingly she sent me, through Miss Ames, an urgent invitation to come to see her as soon as possible. This invitation was reinforced by a letter she wrote me; and the next Saturday afternoon I set out, all eagerness, to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Shelling.

She proved to be the destroyer of illusions, and the bearer of bad news; but, even before she spoke a word, I inwardly recoiled from her, and she was disappointed, too, in me.

"Well, you don't look like your mother, do you?" was the way she greeted me in the doorway of her home. "Howsumever," pulling me into the house, "handsome is as handsome does. Your mother wasn't a beauty either, but she was so good that it just shone out in her face. And she was the highest-educated person that ever set foot in my house. Some folks put on airs just because they know more'n the rest of us, but it wa'n't so with your ma. The more she read an' studied—she was always studyin'—the humbler she was, an' there

wa'n't nobody too low f'r her to speak to an' try to help. Not that she preached goodness to 'em. She didn't. But she practiced goodness all the time, an' that's what folks remember after you are gone." Then, in the casual way in which people tear open a wound, Mrs. Shelling inquired, "Ever hear from your sister?"

I shook my head.

"Well," my hostess went on, as if glad of a chance to free her mind, "I didn't suppose you did. The Coleses just worship the ground that child walks on. Nothin's too good f'r her, an' it'll be a mercy if she ain't spoiled. How old is she now?"

"Twelve."

"I thought so. Well, she's like a little doll, as pretty an' dressed up as can be, an' they say she's quicker'n chain lightnin', too. But, of course, all the old inhabitants know she didn't get her brains from the Coleses. An' between you an' me," Mrs. Shelling nodded emphatically, "that's what's worryin' 'em. They're so afraid somebody'll tell her she ain't their own child that it's as much as ever they'll do to let her out of their sight a minute. You know, Mrs. Coles was pretty well along in years when she got married, anyway; an' then marryin' her first cousin so, why, children was a sensitive point with her. An' she overdoes it, tryin' to convince herself an' everybody else that Alison's her own flesh an' blood. An' the doctor is every mite as bad. That child drives with him everywhere when he's out makin' calls, unless it's somethin' catchin'. Why, it has got to be a joke. When Dr. Coles's buggy stands in front of anybody's house the neighbors can always tell whether folks has anything contagious the matter with 'em, accordin' to whether Alison is on the driver's seat or not. An' she ain't allowed to go to public school for fear some of the scholars will up an' tell her she's adopted. She studies at home, I'd have you know, an' a high-priced teacher comes every day from Manchester to hear her lessons.

An' there's only a few children in the village that's good enough for her to play with, an' then only under the eye of Mrs. Coles. Why, I called there one day several years ago to get some medicine, an' it happened there was so many patients in the office ahead of me that the hired girl took me into the sittin' room. Mrs. Coles was there workin' on some embroidery, an' Alison, as round an' rosy as you please, set rockin' in her little rockin' chair, an' lookin' at a picture book. Bimeby she sneezed.

"'Oh, darlin',' Mrs. Coles called out, as scared as if she'd seen a ghost, 'please move over to this high-backed chair. Mamma's *so* afraid you'll take more cold in that little rockin' chair. There's no protection to it.' Honest, Dorothy, I had to laugh. An' that's the way they go on about her the whole endurin' time. I don't suppose they'll like the idea of your bein' in these parts." Here she regarded me with careful scrutiny. "You two girls don't look alike a bit. You're your father all over again, an' Alison, as far as I can see—an' I have eyed her pretty close at times—don't favor any of her folks." There was a pause, and then she asked, "Are you goin' there to call when they get back?"

The question took me off my guard. "Why, no," I said. "Of course not."

"Well," Mrs. Shelling rejoined a little testily, "she's your sister, an' I should think you'd want to see her."

I made no reply, and she repeated the remark.

"Mrs. Shelling," I said at last, "it isn't a question of what I want."

"You don't need to have any false modesty about introducin' yourself," she insisted. "You're better born than the whole brood of Coleses. Everybody hereabouts knows that some of the best blood in this country runs in the veins of your father's folks."

"Then here's a chance for me to prove it," I replied, and as soon as possible I bade Mrs. Shelling adieu.

CHAPTER VII

PHILIP AND ALISON

FOR the next few months, outwardly I pursued an uneventful way, but my inner life was full of turbulence. The earlier loneliness at grandfather's seemed insignificant in comparison with the desolation I now felt. What it meant that Alison was being brought up in ignorance of her birth dawned upon me now, and I vowed a solemn vow that she should never know of our relationship through me; nor should Dr. and Mrs. Coles have just cause to suspect me of any wish to change the plans which they had made for her; furthermore, I would keep my distance from every one who had known our family. So far as possible I would efface myself: Alison should have her chance in life. But for me the interview with Mrs. Shelling changed the universe.

After that interview, I tried not to think of Alison, or at least tried to think of her as in the far-off region of the dead—as some one I had loved and lost, whose memory would always be a benediction. But this didn't work out well, for I saw her frequently—at a distance to be sure, but very plainly—as she drove about with Dr. Coles. And then such waves of loneliness and longing would sweep over me as now seem prophetic of what was to come.

For college in itself I cared nothing; but I realized that what is called "an education" was my best preparation for a life of self-support; in fact, preparation was itself handicapped by the immediate need to earn; and, for a part of each undergraduate year except the last,

I was away from Manchester teaching district school and keeping up, more or less, with my own class work meanwhile. An indifferent scholar myself, I seemed to have the knack of making others learn; at any rate, there was no lack of opportunity. I taught three terms of district school in my first three years in college. The faculty, however, had long since decreed that no student should be absent from the university during senior year. Accordingly when that period arrived, I bestirred myself in Manchester, and secured some regular reporting for a local newspaper, for which, from time to time, I had written heretofore, and also coached a delinquent grammar-school pupil with whose attitude toward lessons I could fully sympathize.

But I am getting ahead of my story, and must return to freshman year. It was about the middle of that year that I was first conscious of any vital interest apart from Alison. I had had a long childhood. Boys had not been in my world at all, except at grandfather's as creatures to be avoided on the ground that they seemed to know instinctively that one was afraid of dogs, and knowing this, encouraged all the stray curs of the neighborhood to make a dive at one as one went back and forth from school. In college, things were different.

Ours was a large class, as numbers went in the University of Manchester, and the recitation sections were not always identical. At first I distinguished among recitation periods, only by the mental note, that some were worse than others. But, from the beginning of the winter term, studying the Tacitus lesson was less irksome than any other task: by and by it grew to be decidedly agreeable. I prided myself on polishing my translation and pulling all the weeds of syntax from my little Latin patch, so that I went to that one class as letter-perfect as the greatest grind. And the hour that we spent there from four o'clock till five of the winter afternoon was the shortest of the day.

On the bench in front of me sat, usually, a boy whom I shall call Philip. I can see him now—a dark, slight boy of about my own age, who came to college with a reputation for high scholarship acquired in one of New England's best known secondary schools. One afternoon Philip was not in his place when I stole into mine; however it was early yet, and opening my Tacitus, I went over a difficult passage in the text, while, singly or in groups, members of the class trooped in. I read the text twice through, but couldn't have told a word of it. Unconsciously, I was listening for Philip's voice out in the hall. But there was no sound of it.

Finally, the hum of conversation ceased; a bell rang warningly; Professor Tilotson began to speak. At this I looked up indignantly. What did he mean, I asked myself, by beginning now when nobody was there? The bell was tolling by this time, and suddenly I heard a step upon the stairs, then some one hurrying through the hall, then the opening of the class-room door. I breathed a quick sigh of relief and forgave Professor Tilotson. The class-room was no longer empty. Philip had arrived.

But it wasn't Philip, after all. Something kept me from turning round to look, but presently a boy, to whose existence I never gave a thought, advanced into the range of vision, and took his customary seat by the window clear across the room. Then I strained my ears to catch a sound of other steps, but the silence was unbroken save by the droning of the students and the questioning and comment of Professor Tilotson. It seemed to me the hour would never end. And when the bell did ring at last, it brought me no release from a sense of shame, the memory of which is even now so poignant that it is difficult to write of it.

My ideas of the relations of the sexes had been founded on an occasional maxim from Aunt Jane to the effect that a girl who had any inclination for the society of boys was more than likely to come to some bad end,

while a girl who "ran after" boys or, unasked, evinced any interest in them, was already started on the downward path. It was not a subject that was often referred to, but the gist of such teaching as I had had was that one should recognize marriage in general as a sacrament of the church, and an institution of the human race; but to think of marriage in particular, to look forward to it as a pleasing possibility in one's own life, was something no right-minded girl would be guilty of.

This was also the impression gleaned from the few novels I read at grandfather's: three-volume romances they were, the fiction of an earlier generation, which, at times, I resurrected from the attic tomb to while away the tedium of rainy afternoons. Invariably the heroines of those tales busied themselves with the sampler and the harpsichord, and were surprised almost to the point of swooning when a suitor declared himself; indeed, it was only after many repulses and long parleyings in stilted speech that he was finally accepted; and, in token thereof, was allowed, on bended knee, to kiss the fair one's hand. All this may or may not have been literature: it certainly was not life. I read but few of these romances, for I found them very tiresome, though I took for granted that the picture they presented of the grown-up world was true. But I was only a child—a child who had no curiosity concerning the life of men and women, but beguiled her solitude by dreaming of the distant sister who would some day be near.

Now, however, everything was changed. The long childhood was ended. Alison was no nearer than before; on the contrary, she was more remote than ever, for I had come to understand how impossible of fulfillment were the hopes I had indulged; and the discovery that the charm of Tacitus recitation was owing solely to a boy, was tantamount to conviction of immodesty. By the light of that day's discovery I saw that I had deceived myself, attributing to zeal in lessons an incentive

springing from another source. It would have been bad enough, I reasoned, to be so deeply interested in a boy who was interested in me; but Philip disapproved of co-eds, and ignored us all; to me he had never spoken more than a dozen words, and those only of necessity, while I was lavishing on him all my thought. It was not, however, wounded vanity that smote me; it was the belief that I was guilty of something unworthy and unwomanly.

CHAPTER VIII

ONE CO-ED'S ORDEAL

FROM that day I struggled against the thought of Philip as if it were a sin. A sin! When I know now that nothing ever was more free from any taint of wrong. Deprived of the natural channels of family affection, instinctively, unknowingly, I had built up an ideal of all the virtues and given it Philip's name. That the real boy bore little resemblance to the hero whom I secretly adored no one could have convinced me at that time, nor does later knowledge render the experience less significant. At sixteen, people are what we think they are; and the slender, brown-haired boy who sat on the bench in front of me in Tacitus class was the noblest creature in the world.

As time went on, the influence of this ideal increased. The struggle to cast it out only intrenched it more securely still, and quickened the impulse to concealment which had always guided me in reference to Alison. I never went to class without steeling myself against disappointment, should Philip not be there; nor, on the other hand, against disclosure of the joy his presence gave. I was constantly on guard lest some one should surprise me looking at him. When his name was mentioned in the girls' reading-room or any place where the co-eds congregated, I was ever vigilant lest some word of mine, some glance, something in my voice should betray me to them all. I tried to train myself to receive composedly any news about him any time and anywhere.

Invitations came to me in college, as they come to

any girl, but for the most part I declined them—from only one source would they have been welcome. I remember one evening, however, going to the theater with a classmate who had been with Philip in preparatory school; that fact, indeed, constituted the young man's only merit in my sight, and I accepted the invitation in the hope that I could make him talk about those preparatory school days. He did until the curtain rose; then I tried to interest myself in the comedy enacted on the stage, but soon Philip himself and a "town girl"—as differentiated from a "co-ed" in local society—entered the theater a little late and were ushered into seats a few rows ahead of us. After that evening I found it easier to remain at home.

Had my attitude toward Philip differed in no way from my attitude toward the other boys, I might easily have known him better than I ever did. Despite his disapproval of co-eds, he could scarcely have refused an appeal for help with some puzzling "original" in geometry had I made such appeal on any of the frequent occasions when I chanced upon him studying in the college library; but I could no more have made such appeal than if we had been thousands of miles apart. With the other boys indeed it was my policy to let them make such overtures as were to be made, but with them at least I could be natural. A normal acquaintance with Philip might have banished any tenderer feeling on my part, but this is not a story of what might have been: it is a chronicle of truth. I felt that under the circumstances the only way to save my self-respect was never to encroach on Philip's territory, but to stand fast on my own ground.

The dividing lines were clearly drawn. In the university feeling ran high between those young men who approved of co-education, and those who objected to the presence of the girls. Philip belonged to the objectors: to any co-ed individually he was courteous enough, if

circumstances compelled him to take cognizance of her, but he had no liking for us collectively.

Many of the girls resented this, but I secretly sympathized with his sentiments. I didn't believe in co-education myself when I found out what it meant. At grandfather's the University of Manchester had been to me an institution hallowed by the associations of my father's family. It was near Alison, and it was the only place I knew. In high school I had found no hostility between the boys and girls, and I never thought that conditions would be different in the university; in fact, I never thought of it at all, and never heard the word "co-ed" until I went to college. There the entire student body assembled in chapel every morning, and the girls sat up in front; at the conclusion of the exercises it was customary for us to file out first, while the young men awaited with more or less decorum our departure from the hall. That long march to the door with the sense of being under the scrutiny of hostile eyes was an ordeal from which I always shrank.

Then the question naturally rises, "Why did I remain?" Women's colleges were numerous: why not go to one of them? The answer is found in my inexperience and poverty. I was fifteen and a half years old when I entered college. I found it hard enough to work my way in Manchester where I was known to some extent and soon secured a foothold. Ignorant of how or where to obtain another opening, I groped on blindly where I was.

My conviction that the co-education of the sexes was unwise deepened every term, but I rarely voiced my sentiments, feeling that they would come with poor grace from one who was herself a co-ed. A sense of loyalty to the institution where I was being trained for the big job of life restrained me from criticizing anything in her policy; furthermore, I could not tell to what extent an unhappy personal experience tinged my view of co-edu-

cation as a whole. Accordingly I held my peace, save on one occasion which is indelibly engraved on the page of memory.

It was in junior year and the ever-smouldering hostility between the sexes had been stirred into fresh flame by the conduct of a few hot-headed freshmen boys whose antagonism to the college girls had led them into flagrant breaches of etiquette for which a few equally hot-headed girls had demanded public apology. The apology was not forthcoming, but right on the heels of this incident occurred the class elections of the under classes, and a meeting to choose a board of editors for a new weekly soon to be issued by the student body. Many of the girls absented themselves from the class elections, and the few who did attend were hissed in freshman meeting. However, adopting the attitude of martyrs they remained until adjournment, when they carried to the absentees a full report of what was done. Not only were the co-eds unrepresented in any office of either class, but the new officers were conspicuously antagonistic to the girls, and one of the hot-headed freshmen whose recent slogan had been "No Apology"—himself the son of the owner of the newspaper whose circulation was the greatest of any journal in the State—was chosen to the editorial board of the new weekly.

This it seems the co-eds looked upon as the last straw, and I found out later that they especially resented it in view of my own connection with the local press, though at the time I knew nothing of this fact, and regarded the whole matter with little interest; indeed, had the position been offered me without one dissenting voice it would have been declined, for I had neither the time nor the inclination to attempt something for which I knew myself to be unfitted. As a matter of fact, the weekly never materialized. But that has nothing to do with this story.

One morning while excitement was at fever heat, I

entered the co-eds' reading-room in the main building, and was greeted with shouts of welcome from the half a dozen sophomores who were already there.

"Much—obliged—to—you," they chorused, lingering on each word; then one of them who was a head taller than I, and several years older too, patted me on the shoulder approvingly. "Such a nice little junior lady," she averred.

Before I could find voice to ask what it was all about, a couple of freshman girls excitedly walked in. "Say, Miss Baldwin, you're the stuff," exclaimed one of them as she shook hands with me. And the other, waving a copy of the morning newspaper in the direction of some boys who loitered on the campus, muttered, "I guess that'll hold 'em for awhile."

I sank into a chair and gazed around me in bewilderment. "Well, girls," I said, "you may know what you mean yourselves, but I haven't the least idea."

For answer one of them thrust into my hands a copy of the newspaper and these headlines stared me out of countenance: "*Co-ed Attacks the Boys! Taxation without Representation! Scathing Denunciation of the Way They Do Things at the University!*"

With flaming cheeks I read the article. It was signed "Invicta;" the writer displayed remarkable acquaintance with the language of invective, heaping scorn and ridicule upon the college boys and repaying with interest all the insults which she claimed had been offered to the women students of the university. The "injustice" of the treatment to which it was alleged co-eds were subjected, she attributed to the influence of "vulgar upstarts" in the student body, who themselves the sons of "nouveau riche papas," looked down upon the co-eds as social inferiors; in conclusion, the writer appealed to the public spirit of the community to see to it that conditions were altered speedily, and the offenders ostracized.

The article was half a column long, every word of it written by a pen dipped in gall; each new paragraph, as I read it with the other girls looking on, deepened the loathing which the first sight of the headlines had inspired. It was horrible enough to be suspected by any one of having written such an article, but uppermost in my mind was a sickening sense of Philip's scorn. If the girls knew me so little as to believe I wrote the article, what must Philip think?

Meanwhile I was dimly conscious of hearing snatches of excited conversation in the hall; then the door opened to admit a bevy of co-eds whose voices were pitched high. Something in the atmosphere of the room hushed them instantly, and they stood silent like the rest, till I handed back the newspaper to the sophomore who had given it to me. She kissed me. Then a senior, who was the usual spokesman of us all on occasions of formality, stepped forward; the others fell back a little.

"I propose a vote of thanks to Dorothy," said the senior, her voice tense with feeling. "To the girl who has expressed the sentiments of every one of us."

"Oh, don't," I cried. But several enthusiasts had already seconded the motion, and the vote was carried with applause.

The senior, smiling, turned to me with, "You're far too modest, Dorothy."

I have never been able to make out why the girls so misunderstood me at that time. It would seem that such genuine emotion, such humiliation as I experienced would carry conviction anywhere; the only explanation I can find is that the girls, accustomed to think of me as the only one among them who wrote for the newspapers, were so convinced in their own minds that I was the author of the article, and were so jubilant concerning the article itself, as to be oblivious of evidence laid open to their eyes. It is well known that the blindest persons are those who will not see.

But now I found my voice. "You're mistaken," I declared, dashing away the tears. "I *didn't* write it. My sentiments are as far from *that*," I pointed to the article, "as—as the east is from the west." Then it was their turn to be surprised. I fled from the room.

CHAPTER IX

UNDERGRADUATE MILESTONES

WHERE to go I did not know. Conscious only of the impulse to get away, I went out on the campus, and there, attracted by the cool splashing of the fountain, seated myself on the coping that ran around its base, reached down into the basin, and bathed my hot cheeks.

Presently a bell rang. I had lost all sense of time, but had a vague impression that I was due at a lecture somewhere; however, I recalled that I needn't hurry. If I went in late, so much the better: that would prevent further question or comment by the girls. This was what I told myself. But, all the time, I knew it was Philip only I was thinking of.

Slowly I walked back to recitation hall, meeting no one on the way. As I went upstairs, I realized it was only the first bell I had heard. Still I might as well go on: the interval before the lecture must be spent somewhere. As I opened the class-room door and stepped inside, sudden silence fell on a group of young men, who were talking together in low tones. To me the silence was eloquent; furthermore, Philip, who had been facing me when I came into the room, now—with what seemed to me a deliberate movement—turned his back.

In that lecture hour I made no pretense of taking notes, but sat staring at the floor. When we were dismissed, I kept my seat, for I saw that Philip lingered to speak to the professor. Then while they were still conversing after everybody else had gone, I went over to the

blackboard near the door, and, toying with some chalk, waited for Philip to pass by. As he did so, pausing to let the professor precede him through the door, timidly I spoke his name.

There was no response: Philip followed the professor down the hall. I didn't know whether he had heard me or not, but raising my voice I called to him again. By this time he had reached the head of the stairs. He looked up and said, "Do I flatter myself you spoke to me, Miss Baldwin?"

"I did."

Immediately he retraced his steps. In the doorway I awaited him, my clasped fingers twisting restlessly. I had never been alone with him before.

Trying to speak very slowly and to make my voice sound matter-of-fact, though I was trembling from head to foot, I told him I understood there was a general impression in college that I wrote "that awful article."

"What do you mean?" asked Philip. "That screed in the *Press* this morning?"

I nodded. "I *didn't*, Mr. Force," said I. "And I couldn't bear to have—anybody—think I did."

Philip laughed. "Is that all? I supposed you had lost the last friend you had on earth. Why, Miss Baldwin, none of the fellows ever thought you wrote it."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," I breathed in accents of relief as we went downstairs. At the door of the girls' reading-room I said good-by, feeling, as I crossed the threshold, that I had lived a lifetime since I was there before.

In the autumn of my senior year, the "Women's Prize Reading" was inaugurated, and the committee on rhetoricals chose me for one of the eight competitors. The hall was crowded to suffocation, but in the sea of faces that confronted me as I stepped upon the platform, I saw only two: Philip was looking down unconcernedly from the first row in the gallery, and in the center of the

house sat Alison. She was accompanied by Dr. and Mrs. Coles, and their presence was occasioned by the fact that a niece of Dr. Coles's took part. When I began to speak I couldn't have told whether I was saying the words I had rehearsed or not; they sounded to my own ears meaningless. All I knew was that the boy up in the gallery and the girl half-way to the door were listening. Afterward, when the committee gave me the first prize, all I remember is my feeling that it was valueless, because it meant nothing to the boy up in the gallery and to the girl who was being hurried from the hall.

Those two between them made up my world. All I wanted—so it seemed to me—was to be of use, of help to them. They were both better circumstanced than I, but I knew that no one's life is unmixed joy. Their pleasures I did not covet; but it was exclusion in its bitterest sense to be shut out from their griefs. Gradually my emotion was raised to the religious plane. Above all the dear human relationships was a Heavenly Father: in the midst of all the tumults was the quiet Mind of God. What I wanted I could not have, then the only thing to do was to make the best of conditions I was powerless to change. "Not happiness," said our professor in philosophy, "but worthiness to be happy is the highest good." This attitude I did not reach soon, nor did I hold to it consistently, but the glimpses that I sometimes caught, helped me to steer straight my course through the perils of uncharted seas.

CHAPTER X

WHERE TO GO?

ONE raw, gusty afternoon in senior spring, the late spring of the north country, I was descending the steps of the public library building on Chapel Street, when I met Mr. Kane, the Superintendent of Schools in Manchester. His office was in the library building, and, stopping me on the steps, he asked me to return with him to his office.

"I want to have a talk with you," he said.

In the office—a dusty, overcrowded place—he removed a pile of music books and charts, and placed a chair for me beside his desk. When I had seated myself, he dropped into his own old padded office chair, and turned to me with his characteristic kindly look. All the school children, all the college students in Manchester, looked up to Mr. Kane. He was Treasurer of the University, as well as Superintendent of Schools and a friend to every one.

"What are you going to do next year?" Mr. Kane inquired.

"I don't know," I replied. "I have registered in a teachers' agency in Boston, but nothing has turned up yet."

"What would you say," Mr. Kane held some memoranda in his hand, and with them lightly tapped the edge of his desk, "to a position here in the grammar school?"

"Why—why," I stammered, "I never thought of it before. It's very kind of you, Mr. Kane."

This he waived aside. "Not at all. We're looking out for the welfare of the school. The board hasn't forgotten your work last winter as substitute." Then he spoke of salary. "The position of second assistant doesn't pay much the first year. But you couldn't get a large salary anywhere without more experience than you have had. Three terms of district school, is it?"

I nodded.

"Besides, you're very young, and it seems to me it would be a good thing for you when you graduate to start in teaching in a place where you are known."

"Yes," I said, musingly, "that's so."

Mr. Kane wheeled round in his chair. "Well, you think it over for a day or so, and then if you're still of the same mind, come in and sign the contract. In the meantime, I shall not consider anybody else for the position." After a few more words on both sides, he smilingly bowed me out.

I started for my boarding place full of gratitude that the future—the next year at least—was provided for. The struggle to make both ends meet in college had been arduous; to be sure there had been little trouble in finding employment of some sort, but neither reporting for the newspapers, nor tutoring was well paid; anyway, studying left small margin of time to earn. I have said that I was in no sense a student, but to get through college on any terms implies some attention to the curriculum.

"But now," I thought, "that will soon be over with, and I can give all my time to one thing. And I will—oh, I *will*—make a success of it. And then when Dr. and Mrs. Coles hear that I'm successful and that my conduct is irreproachable, perhaps they won't object to my knowing Alison."

Deep in this vein of thought, I was half-way up the hill on Chestnut Street when Mrs. Shelling, who from a street-car had caught sight of me, alighted from the car,

and called to me. The very sight of Mrs. Shelling was odious to me: whatever she said to me was always sure to hurt. As much as possible I avoided her, but now an interview was inevitable.

She greeted me with a rebuke that I had not been to see her all the year, and then demanded, as one who had a right to know, "What you goin' to do when you graduate? Teach school?"

"Oh, I suppose so," I replied, vaguely, being of no mind to tell Mrs. Shelling of the talk with Mr. Kane.

"Most likely," she hazarded, "you'll be lookin' higher than a district school when you're a college graduate?"

I smiled. "College graduates have to take what they can get, I'm told."

"An' I can tell you something else," Mrs. Shelling nodded, and leaned toward me confidentially. "Dr. Coles's folks can scursely wait f'r the day to come when you pack up an' leave. They want to send Alison to college. An' she was all ready a year back—you know she's terrible smart—but they wouldn't send her while you was on the premises. An' they wouldn't send her to any other college because it was too fur from home. What they really *ought* to have," she announced ironically, "is a college in a glass case, right out in their front yard. So long as you're in Manchester they'll keep Alison cooped up."

Mrs. Shelling would have detained me indefinitely, but I pleaded an engagement and escaped. In my room in the college boarding house I paced the floor, turning over and over in my mind the bad news I had heard.

So I was in the way! Standing in Alison's light! I, whose only longing was to serve my sister, was even now a hindrance to the advantages her adopted parents were eager to shower upon her. For a year past, it seemed, I had been unknowingly a hindrance. But now I knew. At once I determined to go away and leave the coast

clear for Alison. But where to go? The world seemed very wide; and I didn't belong anywhere. . . .

"But I must make a place," I said. Then I remembered the name of a teachers' agency in New York which I had heard many people say was more energetic in finding positions for applicants than was the Boston agency, on whose books I was enrolled. I decided that as soon as college closed I would go to New York and register in person. I understood that an applicant who was on the ground stood a better chance than one at a distance. I must go somewhere. It might as well be New York City as any other place.

And so having made up my mind I wrote a note to Mr. Kane, telling him that something had occurred that would keep me from accepting his kind offer of a position in the grammar school. The week following Commencement I started for New York.

CHAPTER XI

MY FIRST DAY IN NEW YORK

MY first view of New York was intoxicating. The roar of traffic, the diversity of street scenes, the bustle of the hurrying crowds, never for an instant bewildered me. I loved it from the start. The transition from the quiet college town where every street, every pathway on the campus, every recitation hall was rife with painful memories was like release from prison to a convict, who through short term of sentence is not yet inured to bondage and the clanking of his chains. My natural buoyancy, forced to the background, heretofore, now sprang to the front; the spirit of adventure was strong within me. Somewhere on the trip down from Manchester Alison's serious sister, Philip's disconcerted classmate disappeared; and in her stead a fresh-faced, eager girl stepped from the train in the Grand Central Station and smiled up at big, beautiful New York as if discovering a fairy godmother who waved a magic wand.

By the calendar it was early in July, otherwise you would never have believed it to be later than the first of May. The weather had been misbehaving for ten days before, but now, repentant and serene, had donned the garb of spring. Not showery, gusty spring, but balmy, cool, invigorating. The air was like champagne.

At this time I was nineteen and a half years old. All the money I had in the world was $17.62; but, for any anxiety I experienced on that score, I might have been a millionaire. For the baccalaureate degree which I had recently acquired, I cared, personally, not a picayune; but

knowing there were persons who held such things in high esteem, I recognized the sheepskin as an asset, and took it with me when I went looking for a job.

The necessity of soon finding work caused me no disquietude. Four years earlier I had started out from grandfather's on a similar quest, and the memory of that experience probably—subconsciously—gave me courage now, but I wasted no time thinking about it. There was too much that was interesting to see. All I remember is the joy of making a little journey in the world, and finding, at the journey's end, such delightful pictures as my first glimpse of New York disclosed.

In view of my circumstances, July does not seem an auspicious time for entrance into the metropolis; furthermore, the usual midsummer business lull was deepened by the hazards of a presidential year. But no stagnation of any kind was apparent to my eyes, as from the Grand Central Station steps I looked out on Forty-second Street.

By and by a news stand caught my eye, and there, in plain sight, was the New York newspaper I had read daily in Manchester. My suit case was too heavy to carry, so I left it on the steps as confidently as if I were in the girls' reading-room in college, darted through the crowd, threw down two pennies on the stand, picked up a copy of the newspaper, and made my way back to the place where I had left my luggage. A portly policeman, who, it turned out, had been watching me, was guarding the suit case; and he began to reprove me for my carelessness.

"Yes, I know," I murmured, apologetically, "but I had to get my newspaper." Then I rattled off the boarding-house address with which an elderly acquaintance in Manchester had provided me, and asked the policeman the easiest way to get to it.

"Stranger in town, ain't ye?"

I nodded. "Don't know a soul."

"That's what I thought when I see ye runnin' away from this," with his stick he motioned toward the hand luggage. "Better not do that again, or ye'll be one suit case shy." Then he gave me directions for reaching my destination.

The directions sounded rather complicated. "Will you please say that again?" I asked, very earnestly.

"Sure," he laughed, and repeated what he had said before. I thanked him. At that he laughed again and put me on my car.

It was an open car, and full of such interesting-looking people that I deeply regretted having to leave them so soon. However, the second car seemed to be filled with their next of kin, so my enjoyment was no less keen; but I had scarcely established friendly relations with an Italian woman and her three youngsters when the conductor, to whom I had confided my address on entering his car, traveled half-way down the aisle, and cut short my conversation with the youngest son of Italy.

"This is your corner," he said. "Go about half a block over toward Broadway."

Then he cautioned me to "mind the step," and helped me with my luggage in the kindest way. Sometimes, in the years since then, I have encountered surly, impolite conductors; but I can testify that the man in charge of one New York surface car, one morning in July, was Lord Chesterfield himself.

The brownstone fronts of West Twenty —— Street were so very much alike that I ventured to climb the steps of Number ——, only after careful scrutiny. The woman in Manchester who had given me the address, had impressed it upon me that one never knew one's neighbors in New York; just as likely as not, there was a gambling joint next door; so I took no chances when I rang the bell of Number ——. A boy in buttons opened the door.

At this period all the boys I saw either looked like

Philip, or they did not look like him. This one brought him vividly to mind, owing to the color of his eyes; and somewhat awed me, too; for, owing to Philip's prominence in the university battalion, I was wont to regard with reverence anything young that wore a uniform. But not even Philip himself in all the refulgence of inspection at dress parade by the Governor of the State, could have bestowed on a civilian a more contemptuous glance than was now bent on me, as, stumbling on the threshold, I tugged at my suit case. The stumbling was awkward, but the tugging was inexcusable. It was my first New York mistake. The boy intimated, by condescending gesture, that he would relieve me of my load. Then I made my next mistake—I thanked him.

He smiled; but not in the manner of the great-girthed officer at the Grand Central Station, nor of the Lord Chesterfield of the surface car; still smiling, he hesitated a moment as if deliberating whether to show me into the drawing-room or to seat me in the hall. Just in the nick of time, I atoned for my mistakes by mentioning the name of the acquaintance in Manchester who had recommended me to this boarding house. She was a woman well-to-do, and, in annual migrations between the North and South, and on returning from sojourns abroad, always spent some weeks in this boarding house, which she much preferred to a hotel. She had but recently left New York; and, on hearing her name, the boy in buttons changed his manner instantly: with pomp and ceremony he ushered me into the drawing-room, then, with a deferential bow, departed to announce my arrival to the landlady.

While awaiting her I examined my surroundings with the eye of untrained curiosity. The room was high-ceilinged, long, and dark; a green-shaded gas jet burned low above a table at the farther end. The place was crowded with massive furniture, most of it now swathed in linen slip covers; but a few chairs fresh from the repair shop,

disclosed blue satin upholstery. Some tapestry of somber hue depicted woodland scenes, and in a niche along the wall, stood a piece of statuary; a couple of large sized oil paintings, too, whose heavy gilt frames seemed, someway, to be larger than themselves, impressed me with a sense of metropolitan magnificence. The president's house in Manchester held nothing in the least degree like this. Suddenly, I remembered my $17.55, and shifted uneasily on the sofa by the door.

But the landlady, coming up from the basement breakfast-room, was already bustling through the hall. Hearing her step, I sat up a little straighter. After the preliminary inquiries for the woman in Manchester who had sent me to her house, she led up to business. "Do you expect to be in town all summer?"

"Oh, yes," I said.

"The reason I ask," explained the landlady, "is because it will make a difference in the price. I keep a first-class house, you understand, but the summer rates are very low. So many people go away that I always close the dining-room in this house by August 1st. But I have a house opposite, Number ——, where the dining-room is never closed, and whoever rooms in this house in summer goes across the way to meals."

"But couldn't I room over there, too?"

"Oh, no," declared the landlady, with an impressive gesture. "All the rooms in that house are taken by the year. Very select parties they are, too. Been with me seven seasons, some of 'em. One family—an old gentleman and his wife—has a whole floor to themselves. They've gone to Europe, now, but they keep their rooms here just the same, and they've got 'em filled with truck from almost every country on the map. But that's their business. They pay the rent; so you see I can't take transients over there. We keep this house open as an accommodation, you understand, and it'll be cheaper for you to room here than to go elsewhere. There's lots of

houses in this locality that it ain't safe for a young girl to step inside of, but under my roof you need never have a fear. Of course, there won't be many people here right in the dead of summer, but you won't be alone in the house; at least not much of the time. One of the chambermaids from across the way takes care of the rooms and fetches over the ice water regular every night at nine, so, you see, you'll be provided for same's if it was the height of the season. An' I can let you have a room on the top floor very cheap."

In response to inquiry she mentioned the lowest summer rate. It was about twice as much as I had expected; however, there seemed to be no alternative, and I engaged the room.

Then the boy in buttons was sent to show me upstairs. The three long flights of stairs seemed to take me very near the sky, and the hall bedroom seemed very small indeed; but, remembering that $17.62 would not last long, even in these cramped quarters, I laughed at my own reflection in the cracked looking-glass and ran downstairs to breakfast. The abundance of the bill of fare, and the novelty of eating in the basement of a house, occupied me for some time; but, presently, with hat and suit carefully brushed, I set out to find the teacher's agency in Union Square, which had been recommended to me in Manchester.

Having found it, I also found a roomful of applicants for positions sitting around in various attitudes of restlessness, and watching furtively a brisk woman who darted here and there, her every motion bespeaking great executive ability, and as well determination not to be waylaid. Occasionally she would pause before some applicant with, "Ah, Miss Barry, did you see Professor Yates?" Or she would ward off some impatient one with a decisive, "To be sure, Miss Caine, but you should have accepted that position in the West." Frequently, she held conferences in a room beyond, from whose door-

way, from time to time, she summoned different candidates to meet school principals. Meantime, her assistants in the outer office did the best they could.

One of them, a sweet-faced girl with dimples, now approached me questioningly.

"I wanted to see Mrs. Yorke," said I.

"Mrs. Yorke is very busy. She has appointments right up to the middle of the afternoon. Is there anything I can do?"

I looked her full in the face, and we both smiled. "Yes, there is," I confessed. "I'll wait all day if need be, but I just have to see Mrs. Yorke herself. Will you let me have a word with her at the first opportunity?"

"With pleasure, but," shrugging her shoulders, "I'm afraid it will be a long wait." Then she smiled again, and nodded toward some magazines and newspapers on a table in the center of the room.

But the people were far more interesting than any magazine. Particularly did Mrs. Yorke herself appeal to me. Wherever she went, my eyes followed her. Her memory for names and faces was drawn on constantly; she never faltered. Tangled threads of many different narratives were thrust upon her all at once; she separated them, and changed from one to another as circumstance required. I admired the way she talked, and the authoritative manner in which she disposed of cases that were referred to her for immediate action. In fact, everything she did fascinated me.

At last, some time in the afternoon, there was a lull, and she came toward my corner of the room. When I realized that I was really her objective point, I rose, and with shining eyes stood smiling up at her; she was a large woman, and gave one the idea of tremendous strength.

She must have understood how genuine was my admiration, for she laid a hand on my shoulder, caressingly, as she asked, "And what are you doing here?"

"I'm waiting," said I.

"And you've been waiting for hours. You certainly have perseverance. Come into the other room."

The other room was quieter—farther removed from the bustle of Broadway. Mrs. Yorke motioned me to a chair, and took one herself, repeating that she was sorry to have kept me waiting so long.

"It didn't seem long," I replied. "I was watching you."

She smiled quizzically. "But you didn't come here to watch me?"

"No. I came for a position. I want one in two weeks."

Mrs. Yorke threw up her hands. "In two weeks? At this time of year? Why didn't you apply before?"

Wide-eyed, I looked at her. "Why, I only graduated last Wednesday."

"But you should have registered six months ago. The great majority of positions for the coming school year are filled in the spring vacation. Of course, vacancies do occur later on, particularly in September, just before the schools reopen, but there's very little doing in midsummer. This was an unusually busy day for this time of year, but even so almost everybody came by appointment. And here you say you want a position in two weeks?"

"Mrs. Yorke," said I, very earnestly, "it isn't simply that I *want* a position in two weeks. I must have one then."

"Why?"

"Because I haven't eighteen dollars in the world."

I did not tell nor did she ask my name or my university; she did, however, ask my age and the extent of my experience as teacher.

"Coaching for two years in college—the last two years—a little substituting in the grammar school, and three terms of district school."

"All right as far as it goes," said Mrs. Yorke. "Are you a good disciplinarian?"

"I don't know, Mrs. Yorke. The question never came up."

She smiled. "Did you ever happen to teach a *winter* term of district school out in the country?"

I smiled back at her. "Two of them. Some of the big boys were older than I."

"And you never had any trouble?"

"Only to keep ahead of them in algebra," said I.

"But you *did* keep ahead of them?"

"A little way. Sat up half the night to do it, though."

"Would you accept a position anywhere?"

"Beggars mustn't be choosers," I replied. "But—but—I like New York pretty well."

"How long have you been here?"

"Since this morning."

"Who's with you?"

"Nobody."

She gave me a shrewd glance from her gray eyes. "Tell me, did you run away from home?"

Unflinchingly I met her glance, but my lip trembled as I said, "I haven't any home."

"Suppose we can't find teaching for you in two weeks—and I haven't the least idea we can—will you do something else?"

With an impulse of affection toward this straightforward, kindly woman, I laid one hand on her knee. "I'll do anything you tell me to," I said.

With that she led me back to the outer office. Every one had now gone except the assistant who had spoken to me earlier in the day. Mrs. Yorke now addressed her in her brisk, decisive way.

"Miss Browne, here's a girl who is nineteen and a half years old. I don't know her name nor where she comes from, but we're going to keep her in New York.

Give her an application-blank to fill out now, before she goes, and let me have it the first thing in the morning." Turning to me she said, "Come in about noon, to-morrow. Don't *expect* anything then," she warned me, noticing my hopeful attitude, "but just call on general principles. Come in every day." Then she picked up an armful of correspondence, went into the other room, and closed the door.

The application-blank I filled out with the greatest care, paid the registration fee of two dollars, blithely bade Miss Browne "au revoir," and mingled with the Broadway crowds again. It was long past noon, but I was too excited to think of food; with many pauses at shop windows, I wandered back to the corner of my street, and stood there in perplexity, gazing at the cable cars that were clanging up and down Broadway. A policeman chanced to notice me, and, approaching, asked, "Where do ye want to go?"

"Whatever place is farthest for five cents. But I want to be back here by half-past six."

The policeman told me to take a certain car to a certain point, transfer there to a certain other car, and ride to the end of the line. "Do the same thing comin' back," said he, "and that should land ye here by half-past six."

I followed his instructions, and spent a most delightful afternoon on the open cars. All too soon, I found myself again at the street corner which I had already designated mine, and a moment later was climbing the front steps of the boarding house. The servant who opened the door said dinner was in progress; so I went at once to the dining-room, where I was introduced to the guests of the establishment. Most of them were women: none of them was young. I found out later that the occupants of the landlady's other house across the street dubbed this one "The Old Ladies' Home." The conversation at table turned on the summer plans of the company.

"We're going to have another hot spell soon," remarked a dowager. "I feel it in my bones. I've never been in town so late before, and should have gone to Lake George as usual if I could have had my old rooms." She raised her eyes to a neighbor's evening newspaper. "There, what did I tell you? 'Warmer to-morrow!'"

Another woman bemoaned the fact that neither for love nor money could one get accommodations on transatlantic steamers before the first of August. "And I just won't stay in town till then, with everybody gone," she said. "The very thought of it gives me the blues."

A third woman deplored her dressmaker's deceitfulness. "And she promised my things two weeks ago. Here I've stayed on in the hope each day would be the last. Three separate times the tickets have been bought." Tragically she looked around the dining-room.

A placid old lady now addressed me. "You're a brave girl to face a New York summer all alone."

"But why does everybody go away?" I asked. "I think New York is beautiful."

"Have you ever spent a summer here?" inquired three women all at once.

"No," I reluctantly confessed.

"That explains it," declared she who was the dupe of the dressmaker. "But you'll be getting out yourself when the mercury begins to climb."

"Now don't you frighten the young lady," spoke up an elderly bachelor. "New York isn't half bad in summer. There's always a fine breeze on the roof gardens. If you have friends in town, they'll show you a good time. I'm a New Yorker myself"—his tone implied reproof for those who had spoken earlier—"and I always stand up for my town."

"Yes, he stands not upon the order of his going, but goes to Europe for three months directly the hot weather comes," threw out one woman, as he disappeared. "I've known Timothy Odgers twenty years."

Everybody laughed and with renewed energy resumed discussion of the weather. To me, however, it was a matter of little consequence. I was chiefly occupied with the wonder of being in New York at all, and with the kindness of every one. My heart was full of gratitude as I climbed once more to my hall bedroom, and there reviewed the happenings of the day.

Mrs. Yorke especially appeared like a good angel in my thought of her—she had said they would keep me in New York. So this was going to be home! This big city, this small room! I could not remember any home. But with a sense of belonging in this new environment, I looked around the room, making a mental note of the furnishings, and peered up at the walls. They would be less bare when the pictures I had brought were hung; and, as soon as I was able, I would buy another chair.

On the bureau lay the newspaper I had bought that morning. That morning! It seemed centuries since then. By the sputtering gas jet I tried to read, but soon abandoned the attempt; the monotonous rumble of the elevated trains over on Sixth Avenue rolled in through the open window, heavy with soporific influence. The maid appeared with ice water, and let down the folding-bed.

As I said my prayers that night Philip and Alison seemed very, very far away. This was another world. Wouldn't it be beautiful if they could be here, too? Of course, I knew they couldn't, but I fell asleep wishing that they could; and I dreamed of transferring from one car to another, where I saw them always a little way ahead. And everywhere I went by dreamland rapid transit, Mrs. Yorke was the conductor; and she almost broke my heart by chiding me for losing my suit case on the Grand Central Station steps. Thus closed my first day in New York.

CHAPTER XII

"WOMAN SUFFRAGE"—AND A JOB

FOR the next two weeks, according to instructions from Mrs. Yorke, I called every day at her office in Union Square. But there was nothing for me. The small supply of money was dwindling rapidly, and my spirit of adventure died a sudden death.

But hope revived when, on the sixteenth morning, I found at the breakfast table a note from Mrs. Yorke telling me to report at her office at ten o'clock that day. Prompt to the minute I walked in, thinking I was ready to teach school in China should that necessity arise. Mrs. Yorke's first words were a surprise. "What is your attitude toward woman suffrage?" she inquired.

"'Woman suffrage?'" I repeated, blankly. "Why, I don't believe in it."

"H'm—that's too bad," mused Mrs. Yorke. "In everything else you're the very person for this place."

"But since I couldn't vote, even if I wanted to—" I began.

"Yes, I'm coming to that," she smiled. "By the time you're old enough, perhaps you'll want to." Then she went on to explain that a certain Mrs. Grey, a woman of wealth and social prominence, was about to start a society for improving the condition of working girls. Mrs. Grey's husband had died recently, and she purposed to devote her time and money now to philanthropy. The plans she was formulating were wide-reaching in their scope, the methods she had in mind were at that time novel in philanthropy. At the outset

she wished to find some young woman whom she could train in all branches of her work. An ardent suffragist herself, she would naturally prefer some one in sympathy with that phase of her activity.

"However, she may like to try her hand on you," laughed Mrs. Yorke. "If she can convince you of the desirability of votes for women, you'll be worth a great deal to the cause."

At this I tossed my head. Mrs. Yorke held up a finger, warningly.

"It's not a vital matter, anyway, at this stage. And you mustn't quarrel with your bread and butter."

This brought up once more the money worries which, for the moment, had been banished by this unexpected talk. "No, I can't afford to do that," I said, "but I have to be honest."

"Well, be honest, but don't be belligerent. There was a look in your eye when I said 'suffrage' that didn't argue well for success with Mrs. Grey. She's a fine woman, and much older and wiser than you are. In everything but this you would be ideal for her, and I shall tell her so." With that she sat down to her desk, wrote a note, and sent me with it to the home of Mrs. Grey.

The house on upper Fifth Avenue had every outward appearance of being closed for the summer; but when I rang the bell, a care-taking person in calico let me into the shrouded hall, saying, as she did so, "Mrs. Grey is staying in the country, miss, but she came in town last night. After breakfast, she went out for a drive, but we expect her back any minute now."

Then, laying my letter of introduction on a table in the hall, she led me through the house to a large room at the back where fresh flowers, newspapers, magazines, and a littered writing table lent an air of occupancy.

I took up a magazine, and was scanning the table of contents, when the door-bell rang again, and I heard the

caretaker shuffling through the hall; then the sound of voices, question, and reply.

Presently Mrs. Grey herself, with soft silken swish, entered the room where I awaited her. I started at the sight. Unconsciously I had been expecting the type of woman who furnished material for the paragraphers and caricaturists of the day—a tall, short-haired, rampant female, shrieking for her "rights." I saw, instead, a small, slender figure, feminine to her finger-tips.

"Mrs. Yorke writes me," she said, coming forward with the letter in her hand, "that you are the young lady I am looking for, and"—with a kind glance from the dark, deep-lidded eyes—"I'm inclined to think so, too."

This put me more at ease. The first shock of finding Mrs. Grey so different from my expectation had plunged me in embarrassment. In early years our opinions are so rigid, so uncompromising, that new to the long task of readjustment which is life, we make transitions awkwardly. In the presence of this gentlewoman of ripened culture and perfect poise, I was conscious of my own ignorance and crudity. But, when I knew that by some miracle I found favor in her sight, the knowledge gave me confidence.

In a voice that was music to my ears, she questioned me. Then she told me what she hoped to do. In her talk there was much of helpfulness, much of improving conditions which she referred to as "deplorable," much of perfecting a system of practical benevolence. But there was not a word of "Woman's Rights." By and by she said:

"Miss Baldwin, I should like to engage you as secretary," and she mentioned a salary which seemed to me munificent. "We will call it 'secretary,' she explained, "since some name is desirable, but really I can't tell what your work will be. At the outset, details are rather vague, you know, but I shall look on you as my personal representative. I suppose that sounds rather terrifying

to you now, but I shall expect to train you first. I am convinced you will fit in admirably with the whole scope of the work. What do you think of it?"

I hesitated, and she went on quickly, "Of course, the salary I mentioned is only to begin with. I should naturally increase it as you gained in experience."

"Oh, it isn't *that*," I burst out. "You're very generous but—didn't Mrs. Yorke tell you? I don't want to vote."

Mrs. Grey heaved a sigh of relief. "Is that all? Why, you couldn't, even if you wanted to."

"I know, *now*. That's what I told Mrs. Yorke. It's all right for the present, but I can't get a position under false pretences. You're going to change things, aren't you?"

Mrs. Grey leaned back in her chair, and that low, musical laugh of hers rippled through the room. "I'm flattered by your confidence. In all seriousness, I hope we *are* going to change things in good time."

"Well," I said, "it would be beautiful to see you every day and—and I need the money, too—but I don't believe in woman suffrage." Solemnly I looked at her. "I don't—*ever*—want to vote."

"I like you all the better for telling me," she answered, "but I never cross bridges till I come to them. If your life is spared, you will learn a great deal and change your opinions on many subjects in the next few years. But it is only the present that concerns us now. I am much more interested to find the right kind of girl to help me in the practical side of philanthropy than I am in her personal political opinions. I sha'n't ask you to do anything of which you disapprove"—there was a twinkle in her eye as she said this—"and you're under no obligation to vote at any time. Now, is it a bargain?"

"Yes," said I. "When shall I begin?"

"At once," said Mrs. Grey.

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. GREY SENDS ME TO BAY SIDE

THUS commenced an association to which I owe more than I can ever tell. Aside from providing me with the means of a livelihood, to be with Mrs. Grey was a liberal education. The training in systematic benevolence and the intimate acquaintance—from the start—with wide-reaching policies, was of great advantage later on, when Mrs. Grey's success inspired many followers to come to us for aid in mapping out their work; while the actual contact with cases of physical suffering among the very poor, and the furnishing relief to the many we were privileged to reach, tended to make practical my text-book knowledge, to foster resourcefulness in emergencies, to widen the outlook, and deepen the sympathies.

It was indeed on the sympathetic side that the work made the greatest appeal to me. The circumstances of my own life, the loneliness that had enshrouded me from my earliest years, was open sesame to every form of misery. Especially girls of my own age opened their hearts to me as they did not to older women. Some way they seemed to know that, whatever they had to say, whatever the limitations of my own experience, I would understand. The personal tragedies of these girls brought me close to the raw edge of reality, and banished the pretty delusions about life which many persons look upon as the crowning grace of girlhood. In our work, no apologetic draping of fact was possible. We dealt at first hand with human documents.

In the presence of so much that we were powerless to remedy, I was discouraged by the little we could do; yet discouragement but spurred me on. For two years I would not listen to any suggestion of vacation. I remained in the boarding house to which I had first gone, where in the winter time I was surrounded by elderly persons, who told me to wear rubbers when it stormed, and who kindly made it their concern to see that I fortified myself with what they deemed "a good breakfast" before venturing outside. In the summer the elderly persons went away, and there were long stretches at a time when I was alone in the house, save that a couple of chambermaids—from the landlady's other house across the street, where I took my meals—were supposed to sleep in the basement. Whether they did or not, I never knew definitely, for I was too timid to travel downstairs through dimly lighted halls at night to investigate.

Of Alison I heard no word; but every girl I met was for me my sister in disguise, and whatever I accomplished in the tenements was done first of all for the sake of Alison. Philip went abroad not long after our graduation from the university; by and by he married, and his marriage set me free. My emotion had always been of the spirit rather than of the flesh, yet, once he was a married man, even thraldom of the spirit would have seemed to me a sin.

In those two years I met no young people whatever save the girls for whose betterment I worked, and their —for the most part—recreant lovers. On the street I often saw young men and women whom I wished that I could meet, but I had no way of meeting them. I remember there were several young men for whose appearance on Fifth Avenue I used to watch each morning. They went downtown to business at the same hour that I went uptown to join Mrs. Grey, and candor compels me to confess that the morning promenade was

punctuated here and there by smiles. I smiled on general principles, because I was young and full of life; also because, failing anything in the form of family associations, I welcomed the sight of the same attractive faces at the same place, at the same time every day; indeed, if it chanced some morning that I met at Thirty-seventh Street the young man who usually passed me ten blocks farther down the avenue, he doubtless understood that I knew he was late. And he knew I knew he understood it, but it went without saying. Smiling was the boundary line.

In reality, my existence was so devoid of the normal pleasures of youth that that morning walk up the avenue was the one joyous incident of the day, the only stimulant I had for long hours of depressing toil; naturally, then, I smiled; and I am glad to say that such spontaneity on the part of a young woman is not necessarily misinterpreted, even in New York. At times somebody would try to pass the boundary line of smiles; whereupon, I promptly decided that he was unworthy of a place in the line of "regulars." His first word marked the date of my last smile.

Occasionally, I accompanied Mrs. Grey to her country place, but it was inconvenient for both of us to be away at once; and even when we did go anywhere together, we carried with us the atmosphere of "shop." Mrs. Grey's own early life had been so different from mine that she did not understand my need of young companionship to offset the gloomy environment of our daily work. At my age she was married, and her existence centered in her husband. With his death she felt that her own life ended, too, so far as any personal interest was concerned; and she often said that she deserved no credit for her philanthropic work, as it represented but a makeshift at existence for herself. In this she did herself injustice. I think she was the type of woman for whom one interest—and only one—is needed. While her husband

lived, she was wrapped up in him; after his death, she became absorbed in philanthropy.

I was useful to her, and she grew fond of me as part of the machine; as such, she spared no labor or expense to secure my comfort and foster my efficiency; for instance, she would spend money lavishly for cabs for me when I went to investigate cases in her stead. She would order meals sent in from expensive restaurants when I was too busy to remember to go out to luncheon. Our office equipment comprised the best that science could devise and money could procure.

In other words, Mrs. Grey would do anything for me in office hours, but, thus far, it never seemed to occur to her to provide me with relaxation after office hours. Of course, there was no reason why she should. I simply mention the fact as throwing light on our relationship. From the beginning she showed appreciation of the care with which I studied her way of doing things, and of the "level-headedness"—as she was kind enough to call it—with which, as time went on, I met responsibility. Aside from this she liked my buoyancy, for she took it as a sign that the daily routine was to me as all-absorbing as it was to her; whereas I summoned cheerfulness to hide a sense of isolation which, foreign to her own experience, I felt she would not understand.

At the end of my second year with Mrs. Grey—about the middle of July—we had a period of record-breaking weather in New York. In robust health thus far, I had been indifferent to the extremes of summer heat and winter cold. But, in this combination of long-continued high temperature and excessive humidity, even my step lagged, my buoyancy declined. I think the weather was only partially responsible for this. At the same time came the culmination of a particularly sad case in the tenements, which for months had sapped my strength and overtaxed my sympathies.

One morning, early in August, when not a breath of

air was stirring, I left the boarding house, after a sleepless night; and, hoping for an easy day, dragged myself up to the office. Our office, at this time, was still nominally in Mrs. Grey's home on upper Fifth Avenue, though most of our work was carried on downtown. As I entered, she thus greeted me:

"How soon can you get ready to go to Bay Side?" The place she mentioned was a summer resort on the New Jersey coast.

Inferring that I was to be sent on some errand of mercy, I replied, "That depends on what supplies I must take with me." Against my will I shrank from the preliminary exertion that "supplies" implied. Unconsciously I sighed. "Is it an urgent case?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Grey.

"Then," with a quick glance at what we called the "emergency chest," which I remembered gratefully had been recently replenished, "I can get ready in an hour. Have you a time table?" The question showed I was not myself, otherwise I should have known that Mrs. Grey had thought out the details.

"The next boat leaves Rector Street at eleven o'clock," she said. "At Atlantic Highlands you take the train, and then, in a very short time, you'll be at the hotel. I've often been there myself, and I've just wired the proprietor to see to it that my friend, Miss Baldwin, has the best the house affords. You're to stay there till the first of September."

"I—don't—understand," I stammered. "You—you said it was—an urgent case."

"It is." There was a pause; then, more gently, she said, "My dear, you're to have a vacation."

I looked at her, and the tears sprang to my eyes; tired and overwrought, I might have cried at anything; at any rate, I could not be insensible to her unwonted gentleness of manner and of voice. I tried to dash the tears away, but they only fell faster.

She led me to a chair, and began to speak again. "I reproach myself for not taking better care of you. The fact is, we're so busy here with official philanthropy that anything more personal than red tape gets crowded out. And I'm ashamed to say the possibility of your breaking down never occurred to me till one of the tenement-house girls suggested it. That shows how blind I've been. I kept piling on the work, and you did it all just as if you weren't on the verge of a breakdown."

I pulled myself together then, and emphatically declared, "I'm not going to break down."

"Indeed you're not if I can help it," she replied. "Here's your salary check"—she tossed it in my lap—"I thought you might like it in advance. And here's another for traveling and hotel expenses. Until September 1st you're to do nothing in this world but rest and get back your red cheeks. I can't afford to have you look like this. Now, promise me you will."

I promised, and tried to thank her, too, but she cut me short. "You haven't anything to say about this case. All you have to do is to obey. Now run along," she gave me a gentle shove—"or you'll miss that boat. In a week or two I shall come down to see how you're making out. In the meantime, you do as I tell you to. *Rest.*" Then she thrust into my hands the time table, and kissed me good-by as she went with me to the door.

CHAPTER XIV

ENTER THE FORSYTHES

LIKE one in a dream, I journeyed to Bay Side. The hotel that was my destination, fronted on the beach, and its rear windows commanded a near view of the Shrewsbury River. It was the typical summer hotel of the period, a big sprawling wooden structure that housed hundreds of guests. My first impression was that there were thousands there, for the time of my arrival was the interval between the bathing hour and luncheon when, under the appetizing influence of gossip and embroidery, the feminine contingent of the rocking-chair fleet held full sway on the piazzas.

As the 'bus drew up before the door, the hotel looked to me like a densely populated playground, hedged in by a whispering gallery where the hum of many voices was intensified. Most of the men had gone to town, but here and there the whiff of a pipe enhanced the rough, good, sea-coast smell, as some long lean figure in flannels or white ducks loomed up among a group of girls, or the rotund shape of some father of a family resignedly trailed up and down in obedience to the whim of his shrill-voiced progeny. Discarded newspapers, which the breeze swept along the floor, testified to the earlier activities of the company, among whom, at opposite ends of the piazza, a couple of venders of Indian basket and bead work vied with each other for supremacy. There was a veritable babel of voices, and, like an undercurrent through it all, ran the roar of the much-sounding sea.

This rhythmic roar of the sea was the only restful element in the panorama whose salient features sprang

upon me at first glance. I was so tired, so unstrung, that even to write my name in the hotel register seemed a terrible ordeal, as I climbed out of the 'bus. But, in the office, my difficulties fled. The hotel people expected me, it seemed, and I was shown at once to a large cool room that looked out upon the sea. I shall never forget the sense of utter weariness with which I undressed and went to bed.

For the greater part of the next twenty-four hours I slept; occasionally a chambermaid would disturb me on the flimsy plea of towels, or some peal of laughter from the corridor would make me remember, for the moment, where I was. But the joy of being there, combined with the far-away strains of the orchestra, and the more soothing music of the sea, would soon lull me back to sleep.

After twenty-four hours, I was wide awake, and as good as new again, for the sovereign remedy of rest was here reinforced by the tonic of a new environment. I had never looked upon the sea before, and my vocabulary was quite inadequate to express the joy which the first sight of it conferred. Eager to compare notes with somebody, I opened conversation with the chambermaid, whom I found singularly unresponsive to old ocean's charm. The waiter who attended to my wants in the dining-room, was also disappointing on this score, and the hotel clerks seemed to think my adjectives a joke. But it was a mystery to me how the multitudes, sojourning by the sea, could be so unappreciative of their own good luck in being there. I wanted to ask them about it, but I couldn't, for I hadn't been introduced. So far as conversation went, I was no better off in this crowded caravansary than in the almost empty boarding house in West Twenty —— Street, New York. But, at least I could see people all about, could breathe the odors of green lands where the salt sea was blowing, and could watch the game—the great human game—go on.

However, the rôle of onlooker didn't long appeal to

me. I wanted to be in the game myself. I used to watch the girls of my own age, who were at the hotel with their mothers, or other chaperons, and, as I observed the feminine attitude to me, I realized, for the first time, that a young woman alone is under suspicion. The "blue blood" of my ancestors, who were gentlemen and scholars, and recognized only the aristocracy of birth and character, surged within me at the thought that because I was the last of my race—because I was alone and worked for my living—I was to be ignored. This realization hurt, but I didn't brood upon it long. There was the ocean at my feet—nothing, nobody, could spoil that!

As a child at grandfather's, I had learned surreptitiously to swim in the mill pond, and I now put my knowledge to the test in the Atlantic. The knowledge stood the test, and, before long, I was known as one of the best swimmers among the guests, particularly from the day when I was fortunate enough to be of assistance in rescuing a half-grown girl, who, venturing out too far, was caught by the undertow.

Following this episode, friendly overtures were made by women, who had recognized my presence only by uplifted eyebrows heretofore; then it was my turn to stand aloof and I made the most of it, persuading myself that my refusal to accept the proffered olive branch was based upon the fact that the women who extended it were idle, overdressed creatures, tiresome in every way. But I know now that I had too much of the arrogance of youth, and was influenced, in part at least, by the rankling memory of the women's earlier attitude. The men, I have not mentioned, chiefly because there were so few of them, and because they fell into three classes—callow youths, superannuated bachelors, and fat, middle-aged married men—all at that time equally unattractive in my eyes. Summing it up, the people didn't interest me, but the ocean did.

This was true for ten days or so, when two people arrived, whose entrance at luncheon-time made a sensation in the dining-room. They turned out to be mother and son, though, owing to the woman's youthful look, and the loverlike demeanor of the man, rumor would have it at the first that they were a newly married pair. As the head waiter seated them at the table where I had a place, their relationship was soon known to me. And I marveled at them both.

All the mothers of grown sons whom I had met thus far, had been self-confessed old ladies, who, in gowns that did not fit, and bonnets that accommodated themselves with difficulty to the wearers' style of hair dressing, radiated the general impression of being prepared to die. Mrs. Forsythe, on the contrary, whatever may have been her hopes of a hereafter, displayed keen interest in the present life. She was as sprightly as a girl, tramped for miles each day, and, in the evening, danced —always with her son—more gracefully than any other woman on the floor. Three days after their arrival, Mrs. Forsythe and I chanced to meet at early breakfast, and she spoke to me; her enthusiasm for the seashore matched my own, and we were deep in conversation, when the young man appeared. Then the mother, glowing with pride and pleasure, as she looked at him, introduced her son.

His name was Paul, but, as I recall him at that period, all I can think of is Apollo. He was tall and straight and fair, and carried himself like a god who condescends for a brief interval to tarry among mortals. Thick, curly, golden hair crowned his massive head; the finely chiselled, smooth-shaven face showed a virile ashen shade on lip and chin. In the surf, and on the sands, everywhere on land and water, his supple, athletic figure was the cynosure of all eyes.

At this time he had just passed his thirty-second birthday. His manner was that of a man of affairs, who

carries with ease heavy responsibilities, who is conversant with policies of world significance. Mrs. Forsythe, on the other hand, was the kind of woman who is perennially young; so her eighteen years of seniority counted for little, when one saw her with her son.

His deference to her, which of itself would have won the hearts of most of the women guests, had in it nothing of traditional filial reverence. It was, instead, if one judged by appearances—and how else could one judge?—the spontaneous expression of a man's devotion to the most fascinating woman in his circle of acquaintances. That she chanced to be his mother, was only an incident; but it was an incident which distinctly enhanced his value in the eyes of a community accustomed to reckon either with sons who entirely disregarded the filial bond, or who were tied to their mothers' apron strings. In short, Paul Forsythe was a new kind of son, and the women placed him on a pedestal.

Of this elevation, and of the admiring glances that followed him, Forsythe, who with a vigorous masculinity combined a subtlety that was almost feminine, appeared unconscious; his considering, caressing eyes, when not bent upon his mother, scanned with interest some distant point on the horizon, or were buried in a book; and this very attitude of detachment—one might almost say indifference—resulted, for the majority of feminine beholders, in adding fuel to the flame. In the vernacular, they were "crazy to meet him."

But not even the most carping critic could have included me among them. I was so ashamed of the way my sex, as I saw them at Bay Side, conducted themselves in regard to Paul Forsythe—I was so disgusted with their open pursuit of him, that I made up my mind I would show him and everybody else that there was at least one girl on the premises who had some self-respect. This resolve I had early opportunity to execute.

CHAPTER XV

A SUNDAY MORNING CHAT

THE first Sunday morning after the arrival of this unusual pair, I was sitting on the piazza with a newspaper, when Paul Forsythe appeared in the doorway after a late breakfast, and placidly surveyed the scene. I had purposely gone down to breakfast early, for I was as persistent in avoiding him at table as the other girls appeared to be in going more than half-way to meet him. The piazza was almost deserted now, for most of the company had gone to church. As I skimmed the newspaper I was conscious of his scrutiny.

"H'mph! Think's he's going to make me look up," I muttered to myself. "Well, he isn't."

Presently he emerged from the doorway, and began pacing up and down. I was sitting by the piazza rail, and several times he passed quite near my chair. But I never raised my eyes. Next he stalked over to a bench beside the window, and for some time sat there studying his cigar tip, and incidentally myself. I do not mean, of course, that Paul Forsythe was guilty of anything so rude and crude as staring; a casual onlooker would never have detected him; but I was conscious that from under half-closed lids, which seemed quite unobserving, he was watching every move I made.

My first impulse was to flee, but, in a wave of antagonism, I remembered that I had just as good right on that piazza as he had: he should not drive me indoors. I meant to sit quite still, but involuntarily I shifted my position so that he could not see my face. By and by he

took another turn, up and down the long hotel piazza; then, having finished his cigar, he casually halted by my side.

"Good morning, Miss Baldwin," he said.

"Oh," said I, looking up. "Good morning, Mr. Forsythe."

"I believe it *is* still morning," was his next remark, "though I assure you it seems late in the afternoon to me —of a rather chilly day."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. You see," letting his eyes rest musingly on me, "I've been working so hard."

"Working? Rather out of your line, isn't it? Anyway, this is supposed to be a day of rest."

With a wave of his hand he dismissed the supposition.

"'Better the day, better the deed.' That's why I saved up this particular job till Sunday."

"Yes," I laughed, "but did you accomplish anything? That's what counts."

"Well," with a scarcely perceptible shrug of the shoulders, "at least I made a start. I made you speak to me. Who was it said, that 'well begun was half done'?"

"Somebody who made an overestimate," I flung out with spirit.

"Possibly," he replied, with a judicial calm that I found hard to bear. "By the way, Miss Baldwin, do you mind if I smoke?"

"Mr. Forsythe," I said, with an air of utter unconcern, "really I don't mind anything you do."

"That *is* nice of you," he cried, gayly. "I have no reason to complain of unkindness from your sex in general. But on my word," with a low bow, "yours is the prettiest speech I have listened to in many a long day." This had the desired effect: it made me furious.

With blazing cheeks I turned on him. "Of all the conceited people I have ever seen! What I meant was"

—in slow, incisive tones I bit off the words—"that nothing you could possibly do—or not do—was of the slightest consequence." I rose abruptly. "I have some letters to write."

"So have I," he said, rising. "But I'm not going to write them. *Please* don't go in. I want to talk to you." He laid a detaining hand on mine. "Why, what a cold little hand it is."

"Just the way it always is," said I, drawing the hand away.

"Then your circulation's poor," said he. "Now sit down, do, and let me diagnose your case. It's a very interesting case." He lingered on the words, till I finally looked up. Then we both laughed and sat down again.

"First of all," said Paul Forsythe, "I shall avail myself of your gracious permission to smoke."

I flashed at him the look of scorn which this merited, but he remained imperturbable. Fumbling in one pocket, he drew forth a short pipe; from another pocket produced a tobacco pouch; next, with deliberation, he rapped out over the piazza rail, a remnant of dead ashes from the pipe, refilled it slowly from the tobacco pouch, lighted it, and settled himself comfortably in his chair. All this time I was watching him. After a few meditative puffs, he began:

"Thus far I haven't had much chance to study the symptoms of the case, for the patient has kept out of sight. And when I did see her in the dining-room, she always had a chip on her shoulder, and a padlock, so to speak, upon her lips. However, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the cold hands of the patient—I assume that the right is as cold as the left, though I've not been able thus far to verify it—spring from excessive independence of spirit. Independence is all right to a certain extent, but there is such a thing as overdoing it. As your medical adviser, I suggest a let-up from now on."

Here he removed his pipe, and bestowed on it a critical inspection. "In other words, Miss Baldwin," here the inspection was transferred to me, "I propose a cessation of hostilities. For two weeks, say, suppose you give me the benefit of the doubt; that is, give me a chance to get acquainted with you. I may not be so bad as you think I am. Just try me and see." His voice had dropped to a note of seriousness now, that was not without its appeal.

I began to wonder if I had been rude. Almost apologetically I smiled up at him. "Why, I—I—hope I have an open mind."

"Good! Then you won't avoid me?"

"No, but—" remembering the conduct of the other girls, I sat up a little straighter. "I sha'n't run after you."

"You won't have to."

"H'mph! I wouldn't anyway."

"Of course not. Then it's a bargain?"

I nodded.

"Shake hands on it," he cried. "It's always well to ratify an agreement of this sort."

The ratification was accomplished with due formality, but an instant later, Forsythe turned to me with a confidential smile. "The symptoms are improved already," he declared. "Your right hand is much warmer than the left was a little while ago."

CHAPTER XVI

THE CHALLENGE

THE conversation still continued when the people came home from church; and many a curious glance was turned in our direction, as dowagers and débutantes swept indoors with prayer books and fans. Presently many of the women returned to the piazza and planted themselves near, but the young man was apparently oblivious of everything except our talk. It might better be called his talk, for with the rôle of listener to the monologue he poured into my ears I combined the activities of a thinking part.

And there was much to think about. When I promised Paul Forsythe to "give him the benefit of the doubt," I also promised myself to look upon the acquaintance as a game. Furthermore, it was a game on which he entered—so I told myself—in a spirit of resentment, that any woman in his presence dare display indifference; for the manifest admiration of the other girls, he apparently cared not a jot. And yet I was convinced that his only reason for seeking my society was that I did not bow down and worship like the rest. He thought he could make me fall into line, did he, if he paid me a little attention? Very well, then, it was a challenge: I would show him I was not afraid.

From that Sunday, Paul Forsythe devoted himself to me; or rather to the task he had set himself, of breaking down my indifference. To this task he brought good looks, an amplitude of accomplishments, a breadth of

experience, and a degree of personal charm, the like of which I had never seen.

But I resented his air of superiority, with its implication of abundant ease. And I even despised him for his immaculate attire and for his extremely well-kept hands. In the workaday world to which I belonged, boys were brought up to earn their bread; but here was a man thirty-two years old, six feet two inches tall, the picture of perfect health, who seemed never to have done a day's work in his life.

This he explained by saying he had been a puny, sickly child, whom the doctors told his mother she could never hope to raise. "But she wouldn't believe them," he declared. "She was scarcely out of her teens, although a widow, when, after a consultation of physicians, she broke up her home, and started out with me on a voyage of discovery, for something which should save my life.

"First she went to Europe, to the best-known specialists of that day; and in carrying out their orders, she became a wanderer on the face of the earth. Travel was not as luxurious then as it is to-day; we often spent months at a time in the open, on the outskirts of civilization, where life on any terms for a woman was difficult. Many mothers have sacrificed themselves in this way, I know, but my mother did still more. Just as soon as I was old enough, and well enough to look after myself, she gave me what I prized most of all—liberty. I was footloose and fancy free. There was money enough, and to spare. I went where I liked, returned when I pleased, and was held to no account for my actions or expenditures." He had been gazing out to sea, while he talked thus reminiscently, but now he turned to me. "Whatever I am to-day," he said, "I owe to mother's influence."

This tribute I liked, and the air of mystery which shrouded him, also appealed to the inexperienced girl. His education, so he told me, had been picked up piece-

meal in the corners of the earth. He had studied in many different schools, he said, but owing to ill-health and a series of accidents on which he lightly touched, had never been graduated from any one of them. Yet, it seemed to me, he had more information on a greater variety of subjects than any professor I had ever listened to.

From his extensive travels, he had acquired knowledge at first hand, of conditions existing in many countries; he knew the history of nations, understood many varieties of government, was familiar with world politics. Nor was this all: in the realms of literature, sculpture, music, poetry, the drama, he appeared to be equally at home. While professing great enthusiasm for the forms of beauty, which older civilizations had revealed to him, he was also keenly alive to the New World's opportunities; and now, after long absence, had returned to his native land, purposing to enter on the study of law, the coming autumn in New York; not with a view to practicing, but to increase his fund of general information.

"I've always meant to study law some time," he said to me, "but I've never got around to it till now."

The contemplative attitude toward life of this loiterer in pleasant paths was a revelation to a girl like me, who had had to hustle for a living almost from the start. His intellectual attainments (or my estimate of them, which amounted to the same thing at the time), enlisted my respect; but they would never have endangered my peace of mind. It is not in my nature to care overmuch for the encyclopedia, even if it is invested with a handsome binding. This was soon evident to such a keen judge of women as Forsythe, and thereafter he emphasized the lighter side of life.

In that field he was pre-eminent. His raillery was of the kind that most appealed to me; and all day long, from the first sight of the big, blond head at the breakfast table, till the last bantering speech in the moonlight on

the sands, I lived in an atmosphere of fun. This was all the more delightful by contrast with the somber background of my life. I was like a child let out of school, where the lessons have all been difficult. Let out of school to play.

I had agreed "not to avoid" Forsythe. I soon found that meant I was to spend with him most of my waking hours. Together we walked, drove, danced, swam, played tennis, and golf. Under Mrs. Forsythe's chaperonage, we made all-day excursions to various pleasure grounds in the vicinity. Whether the mother admitted me to terms of intimacy with herself as another "sacrifice" for Paul, I do not know. But her cordiality was all-sufficient at the time, and the three of us were on the best of terms.

CHAPTER XVII

"PLAYING THE GAME"—THE HANDICAP

OF course, in my heart of hearts, I was immensely flattered that this handsome man of charming manners and superb physique, ignored the other girls, and sought me exclusively, but I endeavored to accept the situation in a matter-of-fact manner, as due to the agreement, to which I had subscribed; and I frequently reminded myself that we were only playing a game which would be finished soon, and, that it was my business to keep my wits about me, and take his semblance of devotion for just what it was worth. Each morning, I girded on the armor of indifference, and entered the arena on the watch for weak points in my antagonist.

"Is Venus going to rise from the waves to-day?" smilingly inquired Forsythe, as we returned to the hotel, after a long morning's tramp.

"I don't know about Venus," I answered, quickly. "But *I* am."

"Don't like flattery, do you?"

"Oh, that's not flattery!" A gesture emphasized my scorn. "That is a misplay."

"No, but honestly, you don't," he insisted. "I've noticed it. In all my travels I never saw a girl before who wasn't susceptible to flattery."

"I suppose you know," said I, "that that is the most insidious flattery of all."

"Well, you're invulnerable anyway. Seriously, Miss Baldwin, you're the most level-headed girl I know."

"Then I'm sorry for the rest of them," I laughed. "Of course I like flattery when it's well done, but I hate to see a man fall below the level of his opportunities."

"So Venus isn't good enough for you? Is that it? Would you like Minerva better?" He gave me a side glance. "They tell me she was an old maid."

"You're getting cruder and cruder," said I. "Really Mr. Forsythe, for a man of your training and experience——"

Just when this sort of talk began to be an effort, I cannot tell, but the time came when I admitted to myself that the rôle was difficult. So long as I was genuinely indifferent to him, I could be at my best—by which I mean "best" from his point of view. I could play the game with zest, while I was unconcerned, but directly I recognized in myself a real wish that he should like me, I knew I was handicapped.

It was his manner to his mother that first attracted me, and when he gradually adopted the same manner to myself, the attraction was still harder to resist. There was the same deference, the same air of hanging on my words, of anticipating my slightest wish, the same attitude of protectiveness; while, in addition, he treated me with the half-tender, half-humorous indulgence that one shows a child. This was particularly effective with a girl like me, who had always been obliged to puzzle out life's problems for herself.

One day he went to town. In his absence Mrs. Forsythe and I kept each other company; that is, she talked to me of Paul, and the two of us—she aloud, and I in silence—counted the hours until train-time. Early in the day she had suggested that we give Paul a surprise, by going to the station to meet him. I agreed to this, but just as we were ready to set out from the hotel, Mrs. Forsythe was summoned to the telephone. It was a long distance message, and glancing at her watch, she told me to go on ahead.

To refuse, would be to indicate that I attached importance to the incident; accordingly, I went alone to meet him. I had spent many, many hours alone with him, but always at his initiative: this was different. And I walked slowly down the road. Even so, I reached the station a little ahead of time. When I heard the whistle, then the rumble of the oncoming train, my heart leaped in sudden, unreasoning joy. It had been a long, long day, but he was coming now.

From a car window he caught sight of me, and rushing to the platform, jumped from the moving train; then, hat in hand, he made short work of the distance to the doorway where I stood.

"Well, this *is* a surprise," he said, and the words in his caressing tone spoke volumes as he took my hand.

Smiling, I glanced up at him; but my hand shook, and there was a catch in my voice, as I explained that, had not the telephone interfered, the surprise would have been twice as great.

"Oh, I like half portions now and then," he threw out laughing.

Heretofore I had always flung back the challenge, but the laugh jarred on me now, and I made no reply. At dinner, too, I was quieter than usual, but Mrs. Forsythe celebrated with such volubility her reunion with her son, that my silence passed unnoticed. Afterward, on the piazza, some women engaged the mother in conversation, and the son said to me, apropos of the regular midweek ball at the other hotel which we had expected to attend:

"Do you mind not going? I'm dead tired to-night."

"Of course not." Unconsciously I sighed.

"Little tired yourself, aren't you?"

"Yes," said I.

"I've had a beastly day in town," Forsythe resumed, "and this chatter," he motioned up and down the piazza, "gets on my nerves. But pretty soon the crowd will hike over to the other house, and we can have this

place to ourselves. There'll be a moon, too, and the music will be far enough away to sound well, and—and you will talk to me."

But I couldn't talk to him. I was quite incapable of keeping up my end of small talk in the game of make believe; the silence into which we fell so terrified me that to escape from it I pleaded a headache soon, and went upstairs to bed.

CHAPTER XVIII

FLIGHT

I TRIED to go to sleep, but after tossing and turning for some time, gave up the attempt; and drawing a low chair to the window, through which a long shaft of moonlight reached, looked out upon the sea. "It's all a game with him," I said very slowly, "but I can't make believe any more. I *will not* let myself care for him. I *will not, will not,*" I repeated over and over again. But all the time I was like a child, who, alone in the dark, sings because he is afraid.

Then I reviewed my life, and for the first time came to some understanding of my temperament. Heretofore, I had gone on blindly accepting conditions, without trying to account for them. Now I questioned the past years. I realized that for better or worse, without power to change, I was the type of woman for whom the affections are of supreme importance; that in my case the very lack of family ties had developed an abnormal craving for love, for sympathy; that in an effort hitherto unconscious to conceal this craving, from what seemed to me were the mocking eyes of men, I had cultivated to the full whatever buoyancy was natural; as mask for undue sensitiveness I had assumed a manner of indifference. The mask, the manner, had served me fairly well till now. This evening they failed utterly.

I thought of Alison, the sister for whom I longed each day with all the strength that, for a passionate nature comes from denial and defeat. I thought, too, of Philip—

or rather it was no longer Philip himself, but what he stood for, that was present to my mind as I relived the college years. The conviction came upon me, that it all amounted to the same thing. As the past had been, so would the future be; by some curse I was doomed always to be baffled by my own intensity; certainty of disappointment was assured by the greatness of my need. A searchlight was playing over the water just then, and in a flash it seemed to illumine a page on which I had often read the words: "To him that hath, shall be given, and he shall have abundance. But from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath."

Then, in another flash, came the reminder that I need never see this man again. Less than a week remained of my holiday. Mrs. Grey had been too busy to fulfill her promise to run down to Bay Side; work was pressing, and I knew that she would welcome my return. I would go back to New York at once, and, by working harder than before, would banish every thought of Paul Forsythe.

In making this resolve, I did not deceive myself with any notion that I was influenced by motives of philanthropy, by increased zeal for the welfare of the poor among whom I worked. I knew it was nothing but the instinct of self-defense. But it should serve its purpose! I would forget the "game" I had been prevailed upon to play!

And then when I had thought it all out, even to deciding on what train to take, my courage slipped away. The blankness, the emptiness of life rushed upon me with overwhelming force. "Why can't I be like other girls?" I sobbed. "Why must I live apart?" At last I cried myself to sleep.

It was only a short sleep from which I wakened before the customary hour; and dressing hurriedly, went down to early breakfast. There, as I had anticipated, I found Mrs. Forsythe, but not her son. The announcement

that I was leaving that forenoon she received with a murmur of astonishment.

"Why, I thought you would be here a week longer anyway. We shall miss you," she said, slipping her arm through mine as we left the dining-room. "Have you a minute to stop in my room?"

"Certainly," I replied.

"I want to tell you," she began, when we were seated in her room, "what a pleasure it has been to meet you here. I hope our paths may cross again, but we're such wanderers, Paul and I, that it isn't very probable. But I shall not forget you, and I hope you will remember me." Here she unlocked a trunk, opened a jewel case, and took out an opal stick-pin, which she brought to me. "This stone I picked up in a quaint, queer shop in Florence. Will you accept it as a souvenir of our acquaintance?"

I thanked her, and took the souvenir, watching, with fascinated eyes, the play of colors in the stone. It was a finer opal than I had ever seen.

"Did you happen to be born in October?" she smilingly inquired.

"No, but I'm not superstitious."

"Of course you aren't," Mrs. Forsythe's tone was resonant with enthusiasm. "Miss Baldwin, you don't know what a relief it is to meet such a sensible girl as you. Paul and I speak of it often. You know," with a half-embarrassed laugh, "the poor fellow has a hard time of it; and as the mother of a handsome son, I have my troubles, too. It practically amounts to this—that any girl to whom Paul pays the least attention, jumps to the conclusion that he wants to marry her; and of course that spoils it all. But we both saw at first glance that you are different. I don't know when Paul has had such a good time as he has since we've been here. You're so wholesome, so bubbling over with health and good spirits, that it has been a real pleasure to us both to meet

you. It only goes to show that a sensible girl doesn't think the one aim of life is matrimony. But," here she caught herself up sharply, with a glance at the clock, "I mustn't detain you. I suppose you want to pack."

"Well," I admitted, "even a sensible girl does have to pack her trunk—unless she can afford a maid."

"And maids are more bother than they're worth," Mrs. Forsythe declared, as she scribbled on her card an address in a New England city; then she gave the card to me, saying, "That is where my sister lives. A letter sent to me there will reach me finally, no matter where I am. And you must give me your New York address. I may have time to look you up some day when I am passing through."

I told her the street and number of the boarding house where I had lived two years. This she wrote in an address book. "If you've been there two years, I suppose it is satisfactory," she said.

"Somebody told me once," said I, "that whatever boarding house one went to, he'd wish he had gone somewhere else. But I don't know any other place, and so I stay on there."

"It's a good location," she mused. "Very central. Paul might like to know of it. He'll be going to New York presently, and, if he really does get interested in studying law this fall, I shall come on later. When the hotel closes here, I'm going to my sister's for a time, and then shall pay a round of visits. But I hate to think of his being in some hotel or boarding house where no one knows him in New York. What is the name of the people who keep that boarding house? 'Mead,' you say?" She wrote the name in parentheses, after the address. "It might be a good place for Paul. I always worry when I'm away from him, for fear he may be injured in some accident, and not have a soul to do a thing for him, or even to let me know. Now with you in the same house I should feel safer about him. Then, if he

should happen to like the table, and we could get rooms that suited us, we might spend the winter there. But dear me," she sighed, "we've been globe trotters so long, that I don't make plans any more. It all depends from day to day on what Paul wants. But, in any case, my dear," she kissed me on both cheeks, "whether we ever meet again, or not, I shall always remember you. Good-by."

"Say good-by to Mr. Forsythe for me, too, will you please?" I asked, as, after thanking her once more, I again started for the door.

"Why, yes, if you don't see him yourself. But you probably will. He'd be so disappointed to miss you. What train are you going to take?"

"The first that I can get ready for."

"Then I'll call him," she announced.

"Please don't," I implored. "You know he said last night that he had had a hard day in New York, and meant to sleep late this morning. And what's the difference anyway?" I added in my most matter-of-fact tone. "It's all in the family. I have said good-by to you, and you will pass it on."

"Well, if you put it that way," she agreed, giving me another approving smile, as she finally let me go, "I suppose the poor fellow does need the sleep."

CHAPTER XIX

IN NEW YORK AGAIN

AND so it chanced that I got away from Bay Side by an early train, without seeing Paul Forsythe again. On the way to town, I told myself that I hoped this was the end of it. This I repeated with much emphasis, trying to convince myself that it was true.

When the boat reached New York, a recent, rapid shower had cooled the air, and clouds still hung refreshingly over the moist streets. I at once sought Mrs. Grey in the down-town apartment, where she spent each afternoon.

She looked up dumfounded as I walked in the door. "What does this mean?" she demanded, but I caught the welcome in her voice.

"I want to go to work. Holidays don't agree with me."

Mrs. Grey surveyed me critically. "You don't look as fit as you ought to, that's a fact. What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing," I protested, nervously. "I shall be all right as soon as I'm in harness. I'm not used to a life of leisure, and a little of the rest cure goes a long way with me." The work, piled up on her desk, caught my eager eye. "What shall I do first?"

"Well," she took up a memorandum, and carefully examined it. "I have an appointment here with an East Side district visitor in half an hour. You might see her for me, and let me start uptown. I have to stop at the Girls' Club on the way, and a settlement house committee is coming to see me to-night." Then, with her usual

directness and brevity, she so put me in touch with what had happened in my absence, that I picked up the varied threads of routine, and went on as if there had been no interruption in the work.

But otherwise there was a difference. The morning after my return I received a note. It read as follows:

"My Dear Miss Baldwin:

"Do you call it playing the game, to run away like this, and take your address with you? If it hadn't been for Mother, I should never have found it out so easily, that is. But never mind! It is my move now, and I'm coming to New York. The game will be continued in our next. Yours till the finish,

"Paul Forsythe."

With mingled emotions I read this, pondering what to say. I wanted to say something, while he was still at Bay Side, that should deter him from coming to my boarding house. Of course I wanted to see him, too, but for the moment I was in a courageous mood. I knew I couldn't go on "playing the game," but I didn't want him to know it, too; therefore it was better that the incident should close, preferably on the note with which it opened. This preference of mine may have sprung from what is referred to as "self-respect"; then again, it may have been only vanity. At any rate, this is what I wrote:

"My Dear Mr. Forsythe:

"Just a word or two about the game! It was a pleasant summer pastime, for which I have not the leisure in New York. Summer is over now, and the game is ended, too. Honors are even, I believe.

"Sincerely yours,

"Dorothy Baldwin."

To this there was no reply, and I tried to think that I was glad of it, despite the fact that I caught myself

watching for the postman every day. A week went by, and I oscillated between the office and my hall bedroom in Mrs. Mead's boarding house. There was nowhere else to go! A man, even though he was alone, could have found outside diversion, when the day's toil was done; for instance, he could have visited a roof garden, heard some music, or lacking all else (except car fare) could have spent the evening on an open car. I realize that this does not represent the height of a lonely soul's ambition, but at least it does afford the opportunity to change the current of one's thoughts; it offers an alternative to solitary hours in the hall bedroom of a boarding house, where the lighted gas—if one attempts to read in summer time—heats the room to the boiling point, and attracts mosquitoes by the score.

Some one may insist that even a woman unaccompanied is not forbidden to patronize the open cars of an evening; and I grant there is no law against it, provided she has the courage to run the risk of street-corner insults, the leer and smile of loungers, and to witness the behavior of certain women who habitually go out alone. After a few trials I gave up the attempt. Somewhere in my consciousness too deep to be explained was the conviction that a nice girl didn't go anywhere alone at night. The fear was ever before me of being arrested by mistake!

At times I persuaded one or another of the old ladies in the boarding house to accompany me on the open cars in the evening. But the old ladies didn't like the crowds; they objected, too, to the whiffs of tobacco-smoke, and much preferred a quiet rubber at whist in Mrs. Mead's back parlor. Truth to tell, I didn't relish overmuch the old ladies' society; although I endeavored to show them the respect and deference due to age, their extreme sensitiveness to draughts rather bored me, who never had a cold; and their conversation, largely in reminiscent strain, was flat, stale, and unprofitable to the ears

of twenty-one. Youthful companionship was what I craved, but outside the girls of the tenements, among whom I worked all day, I didn't know a single young person in New York; and the week following my return from Bay Side I felt more intensely than before the holiday the prostration, which the same routine occasions when no special interest directs it, and no hope sustains the worker.

Early in the second week, Mrs. Forsythe sent me a magazine, and with it a letter, in which after mentioning casually, "Before I forget it, I want to tell you that Paul was glad to know of the boarding house. I shouldn't wonder if he gave it a try," she called my attention to an article she had marked in the magazine, entitled "The New Woman's Realm."

"I thought of you, when I read it," she wrote. "Of course, your life work in the slums brings you in contact with different activities from those mentioned by the author of the article. But the viewpoint is similar, and the sanity is the same. By the way, there's not much sanity here since you left. The Jones girl—you remember the pretty little fool in pink?—and her mother are making a dead set at Paul. The poor fellow spends most of his time dodging them. How I wish you were here to rescue him. I always felt so safe about him, when he was with you."

This letter I tore through twice, and tossed into the scrap basket; the magazine, unopened, found the same resting-place, and I sat and stared at it in a passion of resentment.

I wasn't a new woman! I was as primitive as Eve! Why should Mrs. Forsythe take for granted that my "life work" was a cut and dried affair at twenty-one? What warrant had she for assuming that I was happy in my isolated state, when I only tried to make the best of it? Just because one didn't wear her heart upon her sleeve, was she to be credited with no heart at all? Why

should this woman jump to the conclusion that, because I didn't "make a dead set" at her son, that I was radically different from other girls?

That his marriage with any one would be unwelcome to herself, I had understood from the first time I heard her speak. Why then was she so delighted to have him spend hour after hour with me? What was it that made me so "safe"? Was it my only mission to save sons for their mothers? Why *would* people insist on my being "sensible?"

"Was it because—here the resentment fled and only misery remained—was it because they knew there was no chance for success for me in any other field; I was well aware that I was not a beauty, and that I had no advantage of wealth or station to recommend me. I was just an ordinary girl, alone in a big city, working for my living as were thousands of other girls. I was willing, too, to work; but to be looked upon as incapable of anything but work, to be considered some strange, sexless creature with no share in the common lot of womanhood—that was hard to bear; and it was all the harder because of my own presentiment.

When Mrs. Forsythe gave me the opal, I told her I was not superstitious, and as regards the minor interests of life, what I told her was the truth; but touching the possibility of happiness I was superstitious beyond words. Affection was all I wanted, and I wanted that so much, that the very longing seemed to doom me to defeat. "Don't set your heart on anything," I said aloud, gazing at the scrap basket, "for if you do, you can't get it."

This belief—so utterly at variance with the "New Thought" teaching of to-day—resulted in a dogged determination to cast out Paul Forsythe. If I could only regain the old indifference to him, then perhaps he would like me. This possibility was too vague to give much comfort; but it did light up a ray of hope. And I was so constituted as to be incapable at that time of any out-

look that was impersonal and unemotional. I had to have something, no matter how slight, to cling to, something to hope for, something to look forward to.

But a sense of my own helplessness, and Paul Forsythe's magnificence, came over me anew. I fell upon my knees. "Dear God," I whispered, "won't you—won't you—*make* him like me? I'll be so good."

CHAPTER XX

PURSUIT

THE clatter of a chambermaid coming down the hall roused me; and the clock in the steeple of the church across the street sounded the warning that it was high time I started officeward. Quickly I rose, donned coat and hat, and with a farewell glance at the disturbing letter in the scrap basket, set out for the day's work.

It was a particularly busy day, and I was detained at the office till long past the usual hour of leaving. When I reached the boarding house, I was so tired—physical fatigue being intensified by mental weariness—that on the doorstep I deliberated whether it would not be better to dispense with dinner and go straight upstairs to bed. But I knew I couldn't sleep so soon, and the chatter of the old ladies, as they dallied with their food, seemed less terrible than the silence and solitude of my room; besides, it was so late, there would be less chattering than usual in the dining-room, for the few season guests who had returned to town, were already gathered in the parlor for their evening game of whist.

"Pretty late for dinner, Miss Baldwin," called out one of them, as I passed the door on my way downstairs.

"Better late than never though," chimed in another voice from the card table, "especially to-night."

The meaning of these words, and the smile with which they were accompanied, did not dawn on me, till I opened the door leading from the basement stairway to

the lower hall. Glancing thence into the dining-room beyond, I caught sight of Paul Forsythe.

He was sitting with his back to me, at the foot of the long table in the place next mine. No one else was there. For an instant, clutching at the door-knob, I stood and looked at him. I remember that outside a hurdy-gurdy played; and I could hear the laughter of some children down the block. This intensified the stillness in the house.

Suddenly he turned. I took one step forward, and he started up to meet me; halting on the threshold, and stretching out both hands, he drew me very gently into the dining-room; then pulled out my chair from the table, seated me, pushed the chair back into its place, and quietly resumed his own place at my right. All this time neither of us spoke.

Then the waitress came in from the kitchen, and Mr. Forsythe broke the silence with a flow of small talk that lasted through the meal; but even from the first, I recognized a change in him, and every day the change grew more pronounced. In his manner now, there was nothing of challenge. It was as if the letters we had exchanged on the subject of "the game" had never been thought of. Badinage, which had formed the basis of our companionship at Bay Side, was banished now, and in its stead he emphasized the note of tenderness, of seriousness, of protective care. He said little: he implied everything. Beneath even his most commonplace remark was the tacit implication—which formed the perfection of appeal to a lonely, tired girl—"You're working far too hard, and I'm glad I'm here to look after you."

So thoroughly was this looking after attended to, that the dear old ladies in Mrs. Mead's boarding house believed that a beautiful romance was budding beneath their very eyes; from the day of Paul Forsythe's arrival, when he mentioned to the landlady our meeting at the seashore—which she promptly communicated to her

guests—they fairly bubbled over with anticipation and sympathy. The young man's good looks, his distinguished air, his devoted manner to myself, and his exquisite courtesy to them, all made a great impression on the elderly company, who individually insisted on telling me that I was a lucky girl. "There aren't many like him nowadays," they said.

At Bay Side, Mrs. Forsythe had been in the habit of exclaiming a dozen times a day, "Paul is the best man on earth." Then I had attributed her belief to maternal partiality, but now I came to share it. And I fought no more against the thought of him; I banished melancholy musings on the past, and sad forebodings for the future, too. I just lived from day to day, and was happier than I had ever been.

Summer lingered late that year. September was like June, and the evenings we usually spent outdoors. Heretofore, I had seen nothing of New York at night, but Mr. Forsythe now introduced me to many forms of entertainment, many diverting scenes; and found much enjoyment—so he said—in watching my fresh, enthusiastic interest.

On our way home from my first visit to a roof garden, which I thought as wonderful as fairyland, we dropped in at the restaurant of a quiet, dignified hotel. This, too, was a new experience, and I was so taken up with the surroundings, and so impressed with the waiter's deference, as to be quite indifferent to the bill of fare, which Mr. Forsythe was studying. At last he looked up.

"What are you going to have to eat?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't want anything to *eat*," I cried, as if eating were the last activity appropriate in a restaurant.

"It *is* pretty hot to eat," he agreed. "Well, then, what are you going to have to drink?"

Promptly I brought out the name of my favorite beverage. "A chocolate ice-cream soda."

He laughed his velvet laugh. And with a long look from his considering, caressing eyes replied, "You're a very inexpensive young lady. Here I was prepared to spread the wine list at your feet."

"And that's where it belongs—underfoot," said I.

He laughed his velvet laugh again, and bowed. "Miss White Ribbon, I make you my apologies. For the moment I forgot that in your native State they down the demon rum. I suppose you signed the pledge as soon as you learned to write?"

I acknowledged it.

"And so the Band of Hope is going to have a chocolate—ice—cream—soda?" The words seemed a mile long as he drew them out.

"The Band of Hope may possibly have two," I warned him. "But don't *you* like ice-cream soda?"

He hesitated. "You see, I can't remember. It's fifteen years at least, since I've been up against a proposition of that sort." Then to the waiter, who hovered expectantly, he said, "Bring a chocolate ice-cream soda for the young lady. And for me—h'm—well," throwing down the menu card, "Lalla Rookh."

This was too much for my gravity. "I've heard they had Bibles in some New York hotels for the use of the guests," I chuckled, when the waiter had disappeared, "but I never supposed they had poetry, too."

It was now his turn to be mystified. "Whatever do you mean?" In mock alarm he bent toward me. "I shall never forgive myself if that rotten roof garden show has produced temporary aberration of the mind. Who said anything about poetry?"

"Why, you said 'Lalla Rookh.' I've never read it. But it *is* poetry, isn't it?"

At this he sank back in his chair, and sat watching me with indolent amusement. "Wait and see," he said. "One never can be sure beforehand. It all depends upon the chef."

"Oh," said I, much abashed at the enlightenment.

When the ice-cream soda was set before me, I was—to tell the truth—a little ashamed of it, for my companion still seemed to look upon it as a joke. But all of a sudden I remembered the fable of the country mouse, and the city mouse; and with a desperate resolve to be loyal to the beverage of my college days, I drained the chocolate ice-cream soda to the dregs.

Meantime Mr. Forsythe had attacked, in the guarded manner of the connoisseur, the Lalla Rookh. "Yes, it's poetry," he announced with a judicial air. "Won't you have a copy for yourself? There's more where this came from."

"No, thank you." But the words were a little wistful, and I eyed his glass with interest.

"Well then," he suggested, pushing the glass toward me, "have a verse of mine."

Gingerly I dipped in a spoon, and tasted the punch. "What's it made of?" And then, not waiting for an answer, "Oh, it's *good*," I said.

"As good as a—chocolate—ice—cream—soda?"

"Better," I declared. "And," wonderingly I looked at him, "to think that I had never even heard of it! It's a—a sort of liberal education to know you," I stammered.

My hands were toying nervously with the menu card, and he reached across the little table, and held them for an instant in his own. "You're an apt pupil, Dorothy," he said in a low voice. "I'll teach you all I know."

CHAPTER XXI

THE MOTHER'S ATTITUDE

THE first interruption in this course of teaching (which then concerned itself with dinners, drives, and theaters) came three weeks later, when on Friday, he announced that he was going out of town for the week-end. From what he said, I assumed that he was to join his mother at her sister's in New England; on his return, however, he made no reference to the trip, nor did he give me any message from Mrs. Forsythe. And of course I asked no questions.

As a rule, we breakfasted together, he and I, before the other boarders were astir; and of the two, Mr. Forsythe was usually the more prompt nowadays. But on the third morning after his return, it happened that I reached the breakfast-table first. As I had never seen a letter addressed to him at the boarding house, I was under the impression that he received his mail elsewhere.

This morning, however, there was a letter at his place, and I could not help seeing that it was addressed in a dashing feminine hand, and bore the postmark of "Waban," a Boston suburb. When he came in, and caught sight of the envelope, an expression of annoyance crossed his face; two days later, the same thing occurred. And again in three days more; but on this occasion the near-Boston missive was accompanied by a letter from his mother. This he opened, begging my pardon; read it, and with a sigh exclaimed:

"Poor mother! She hasn't seen me for a month. I've never been away from her quite so long before, and

I guess she doesn't like it." He folded the letter, and put it in his pocket. "That means that I go East again," the "again" slipped out as if unwittingly, "and bring her back with me."

The arrival of Mrs. Forsythe at the boarding house introduced a disturbing element. I was conscious of some subtle change in her attitude to me. It may have been that she had pondered on the perils of propinquity, even with the "safest" of girls, and it may have been that she was not well. I have no wish to judge her: I only know that I could do nothing right. She would ask me to sit with her in her room to keep her company, and then she would criticise everything I said; when, in despair, I held my peace, she would chide me for silence. She even found fault with Paul in public.

At mealtime I was on pins and needles, for I never knew what to expect from her. Her son, too, was ill at ease; nor were we the only individuals concerned. Every one at the table where we sat showed embarrassment in the presence of a situation which it would be indiscreet to recognize. The atmosphere was heavy with the sense of a crisis imminent.

I saw little of Paul alone—his mother would scarcely let me out of her sight, save to go to business or to bed—but, in one chance meeting on the stairs during that first week, he told me that he had engaged an apartment for the winter for his mother and himself at the Meriden, a family hotel, two blocks away. "It will be easier for all of us," he said. And then, with an accent that was a caress, "Just trust me, Dorothy."

Years afterward, some one told me that the day before they left, one of the old ladies in Mrs. Mead's boarding house, weary of beating about the bush, asked Mrs. Forsythe point-blank, if Paul and I were engaged.

"Engaged?" she cried. "My son engaged? Of course not. Not to anybody."

I knew nothing of this then. And on her departure

for the Meriden, Mrs. Forsythe was in high spirits, and addressed me thus: "You must run in to see me very often. It is so near, that it won't be any trouble for you at all. And it will cheer me up. Paul has so many friends, and so many places to go, that I have to fill the empty hours as best I can. And I know," she added, with a keen look, "that you aren't the girl to ignore me when my son is out of sight. The woods are full of girls that cultivate me for what they hope to get out of Paul, but we both saw at first glance that you were different. I shall look for you very soon."

It is safe to say that her anticipation would have been long unfulfilled, had not Paul begged me to give his mother as much time as I could. "Please be good to her," he said. "She really likes you better than she does anybody else. She can't bear to have it mentioned, but she suffers from a disease that makes her irritable at times. You can help me very much by bearing with her moods."

That was enough for me. And I went frequently to see Mrs. Forsythe when I was sure that her son was not at home. Him I saw less often than before, but every few days he would write to me, calling my attention to some newspaper article, suggesting that I read a certain book or magazine, see some picture at an art gallery, or view some new purchase at the Metropolitan Museum. "It is needless to say," he wrote me many, many times, "how great an interest I take in your development. I am living for the future now."

At any rate, *I* was living for the future. It is easy enough to see in retrospect how futile it all was. But to a simple-minded, inexperienced girl whose life had been singularly devoid of tenderness, this friendship opened up rosy vistas by whose light I saw the present only as a training school, in which, please God, I might become the woman Paul Forsythe wanted me to be. To be sure, he had never in so many words said he loved me; and at

times I reminded myself, that no woman had a right to take for granted an affection that was undeclared. But at the reminder, every drop of blood in my body would protest against the charge; insisting that I assumed nothing, I asked nothing, either now or for the future. Love was not a matter of barter: it was a gift. Paul was the best man on earth. How could any one help loving him? He had asked me to trust him. And I did trust him implicitly.

Paul and his mother I tried to keep separate in my thought. But I could not forget that Mrs. Forsythe had brought Paul into the world, and she was the dearer to me for every resemblance to her son. During that winter she came to rely upon me more and more, to do errands for her, and to keep her company; though I responded to her frequent summons, first of all for Paul, I had a very genuine sympathy for her. And I am grateful to remember now that she often spoke to me of my "charity," my unwillingness to criticise. "The trouble is with myself," she said one day in a burst of confidence, "I'm out of tune with everything."

At times she was very kind to me. Perhaps in a shop to which she had asked me to accompany her, she would purchase some dainty, delicate-hued material for a frock; and then when the package was delivered at the Meriden, she would toss it over to me, saying, with a smile, "That's what suits the likes o' ye. Have it made up becomingly." Or some stormy morning she would despatch a note to me at breakfast-time, full of affectionate regret, that on such a bad day I could not stay indoors. I used to wonder now and then, that she who feared for me the dangers of a wintry sky, should not sometimes foresee the possibility of graver injury.

Unless by special invitation I never went to the Meriden in the evening or at any time when I had reason to believe that Paul was there; but if I did not report at least twice a week on my way home from business in the

late afternoon—an hour when I was almost sure to find Mrs. Forsythe alone—she called me to account. Often she invited me to dine and go to the theater. Sometimes she accompanied Paul and me; at other times she sent us off without her. In return she seemed to expect me to spend the night with her when Paul was away from home, and I never knew beforehand in what mood she would be. She would talk to me by the hour of Paul, appealing to me every little while to know if such or such an exploit of her son's was not "wonderful." She heeded little my assent; but had it been withheld, or, on the other hand, had it sprung forth too eagerly, she would have been up in arms.

CHAPTER XXII

RAE DILLABEN

DROPPING in at the Meriden one afternoon in early spring, I found with Mrs. Forsythe a stranger whom she introduced as Miss Dillaben, from Waban. The name of the town struck home, for it was that of the Boston suburb which postmarked the envelopes I had seen addressed to Paul the preceding autumn at the boarding house. The color flamed in my cheeks as I gave Miss Dillaben a swift, embarrassed glance. She, in turn, was narrowly, though smilingly, observing me. Each of us beneath her surface cordiality was searching the other's face for some betrayal of Paul's whereabouts, and shrinking, too, from finding what she sought.

Miss Dillaben was a tall, fine-looking woman, who would attract attention anywhere. She was older than I, and had more repose of manner; yet I noted that her own color deepened as Mrs. Forsythe explained that she had come for a week's visit, but through some mischance Paul—here the mother turned anxiously to the clock—had failed to meet her. "The poor girl had to find her way down here alone. I can't think what is keeping him," she said.

Presently he himself appeared, and, for a moment, stared blankly at Miss Dillaben. "I've been waiting at the station all this time. When did you get in?"

Then it came to light that she had carelessly misinformed him about trains. His evident annoyance heightened her embarrassment, and there was an awkward mo-

ment for us all, which I attempted to cut short by making my escape.

Paul went with me to the elevator. It was only a few steps, and I was conscious that his eyes were on me, but I wouldn't look at him. I wanted to get away as soon as possible, and impulsively reached out my hand to ring the elevator-bell. In my hurry I had not put on my gloves.

Quietly he covered my hand with his own, and prevented me from summoning the lift; then he drew me to an alcove near. The halls were not yet lighted. No one was in sight.

"I shall be more tied up this week than ever, Dorothy," he said. "But mother's guest goes home on Saturday. Will you dine with me—just you and I—that evening as reward of merit for what I must endure till then? Will you?"

"Yes," I said at last, lifting a tremulous glance to his face. Swiftly he bent and kissed my fingers. A moment later I was in the elevator, counting the hours till Saturday.

But when Saturday arrived, he sent me word that he was called away, so the dinner would have to be postponed. Mrs. Forsythe, too, wrote me as follows:

"My Dear:

"I'm half sick as consequence of helping Paul give Rae Dillaben a good time in New York. She went home yesterday, and to-day Paul was called out of town. He will be away till Monday, so please come over right away to rescue the perishing.

"Affectionately,

"Caroline Forsythe."

I went, and remained with her till Monday. Among other things she said to me: "Next fall, Rae is coming to New York to study painting, so she says. But, of

course, I know what is bringing her. There are just as good teachers in Boston as New York, and the Dillabens aren't over and above supplied with this world's goods, so Boston would be better for her every way, *only,*" laying a finger on my knee impressively, "Paul is in New York. That makes all the difference."

"Mrs. Forsythe," I burst out excitedly, "I think you're too bad. You accuse us all as if we were running after your son, and—" The tension broke in a rush of hysterical tears, "we *aren't.*"

She turned to me in surprise, and murmured soothingly, "There, there, sit still, my heart, sit still." I made no reply, and she presently went on in a different tone: "I know *you* aren't, my dear. I tell everybody you are the one girl, the only girl, that never goes one step out of her way on Paul's account. But the others . . . !" She threw up her hands. "I wasn't born yesterday. I know what I know and the rest I can guess. When we first met Rae Dillaben, five years ago, abroad, Paul didn't care a rap for her. Afterward she got some hold on him. But if I know the signs, her day's about over now; and she suspects it, too, or she wouldn't be coming bag and baggage to New York next fall. But I'm perfectly sure in my own mind he'll never marry her. For one thing, he cares too much for my happiness."

"But you aren't happy!" I exclaimed. "You often say so."

"Well, I'm happier than I'd be with a daughter-in-law. And," with a grim smile, "for that matter, so is she."

The whole tone of this conversation was extremely painful to me, and I tried to turn Mrs. Forsythe's thoughts to other channels. What she had said, however, I could not easily forget; and as I pondered late at night, there crept into my mind some doubt of Paul's sincerity.

But when I saw him again, this was banished by his gentleness, by the patience with which he met his mother's petulance, and by his manner to myself. Aside from the calm protective air to which he had accustomed me, there was now the implication that whoever else in the wide universe might misjudge him, he could depend on me. Watching him on his return to the Meriden I reproached myself for permitting Mrs. Forsythe's remarks to influence me even momentarily.

"I can't tell you what a comfort it was to know you were with mother while I was away," he said. "An annoying piece of business called me to Vermont. We own some property up there, and I make a flying visit now and then. But feeling at ease about mother this time because you were with her here, I attended to business thoroughly, and sha'n't have to go there for some time again. You're a great help, Dorothy."

When we were alone, he always called me "Dorothy," and I have mentioned his kissing my hand in the twilight of the hall the day I met Miss Dillaben. But thus far this was all. Everything he did or refrained from doing was calculated to inspire confidence. His manner was eloquent of that deep respect, that reverence, which is so dear to womankind. He had no need, indeed, of recourse to passion's beaten track: he blazed his own trail through the labyrinth of subtlety. At his will, his voice enwrapped the listener in a mantle of tenderness; every gesture, every breath, was an embrace intensified.

Some one has written, "If we begin by overrating the being we love, we shall end by treating him with wholesale injustice." I did so begin, but I wish not so to end. Above all things I desire to be just, both to him and to myself. In this connection I recall that some years later I heard a woman comment on Paul Forsythe. She was a woman long past the heydey of youth, a woman, too, who had been twice married and had brought up successfully a large family of children. This is what

she said: "He is a very dangerous man; not because he is handsome—on the whole I don't think women care especially for a handsome man—but because of his deceptive manner. He is always cautious, careful not to bind himself by word. But his manner toward any woman with whom he chooses to beguile the tedium of an idle hour, is such as to justify her in believing him to be in love with her. I do not like to think of the havoc he has wrought."

CHAPTER XXIII

EASTERTIDE

LENT came late that year, and it was two months after Miss Dillaben's visit to New York that, one evening in Easter week, I sat in Carnegie Hall, listening to the annual concert of an oratorio society to which Paul belonged. Ostensibly I was listening, but in reality I was deaf to all the music, and blind to everything except one figure on the stage.

When Paul brought me the ticket for this orchestra chair—instead of assigning me to the gallery, where the members' friends usually sat—he said that he didn't want me to climb all those stairs. But to me, the immense advantage of the orchestra was that I could see him better. In the intervals, he would smile across the stage to the aisle chair where I sat demure and happy in a new Easter frock and hat; yet, despite the fact that I could watch him, the concert did seem rather long, for had not Paul said that afterward we would have supper at my favorite restaurant? I didn't care for supper, but he had been very busy lately, and I had seen him much less often than usual.

In the restaurant, I gave myself up to complete enjoyment of the setting he had provided for the tête-à-tête. Our table was in a quiet corner where, secure in the shelter of his conspicuousness, I could peer out on the gay scene with a delicious sense of being spectator, not participant.

"How lovely everything is," I sighed, luxuriously, halfway through the meal.

"But you're not eating enough to keep a bird alive."

"Oh," toying with a fork, "I'm too happy to eat to-night."

"And what makes you so happy, little girl?" His voice was very low.

"I—I—don't know," I faltered. "Just everything, I guess."

There was a long pause. I felt his eyes compelling mine. Finally, I looked at him and then swiftly looked away.

"So you think it's a pretty good world?" he asked, gently.

Silence gave consent.

"Well, so do I—to-night," he said. And the way he said it filled my cup of joy to overflowing. "And it's going to be better still."

After that there was silence for the most part; and in the little that was said neither seemed to speak deliberately. But every motion was full of meaning—the slight flicker of the gas, the quiver of the hands, the vibration of the breathing. It was as if an indwelling voice in each called to the other across unsounded depths; as if in the whole world we two were alone.

By and by I looked around me with a start. The room was much less crowded now than it had been at first; as people left, their places were no longer seized upon by new arrivals; the soft-footed waiters, who had been such unobtrusive features heretofore, stood out with sudden distinctness; here and there a light was being lowered; the orchestra were packing up their instruments. At last we rose to go.

The short distance to the boarding house we traversed quickly, silently. On the door-step, with trembling fingers, I gave Paul the latchkey. He opened the outer door and motioned me into the vestibule; then, following, he placed the key in the lock of the inside door and

almost closed the outer door; then, without a word, he took me in his arms.

I made not the slightest effort to resist him. Instead, stunned into a rapturous silence and lifted in his embrace, I drew my arm closer around his neck with a sigh of content and confidence.

"You're going to be mine, Dorothy, *mine,*" he breathed.

"Why, I *am,*" I whispered, when I could get my breath. "I—I—kissed you back again."

But there was a sound outside. People were approaching. Suddenly Paul released me and, turning the key in the lock, opened the inside door and, with a quick farewell caress, pushed me into the hall. A second later I heard the outside door bang behind him.

Then I went upstairs. The halls were dark, but I seemed to be enveloped in a blaze of light as, throbbing with happy thoughts, I hurried to my room. There, first of all, I fell upon my knees and thanked God for Paul's love. To me a kiss was sacred; I had never kissed any man till now, and from Paul's kissing me I believed he wished to marry me. I also believed that, in answer to prayer, the miracle had been wrought by which I had found favor in his sight. Very earnestly I prayed that I might prove not unworthy of this priceless gift.

For a long time I lay awake musing on the difference which this evening's episode would bring into three lives; three, because I did not forget Paul's mother. When he told her, just as first, I feared she would be much displeased. But she could not expect him to remain unmarried always; and if she must have a daughter-in-law, I thought she could not intrinsically object to me.

Then I remembered Miss Dillaben, and a great sympathy sprang up in my heart. I was so accustomed to being left out, it was so strange to think of myself as other than alone in life, that I could feel for her. Her history in the past five years I had no right to know: the

secrets of other lives did not belong to me. But I was confident that Paul was blameless, anyway.

That he had said nothing definite to me of marriage disturbed me not at all: the vestibule was not a suitable place. Even as it was, we had barely escaped the presence of intruders. The main thing was that he loved me: everything else would follow in good time. The realization that it would not long be necessary to plan life out alone, was so new and so delicious that I resented the drowsiness that was gradually stealing over me, blotting out the vividness of this evening's joy. By and by this resentment vanished, too; and, with a strange, sweet sense that everything was well, I sank into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXIV

"BY SPECIAL DELIVERY"

NEXT morning before I left the house, from the florist's on the Broadway corner of the street came a box containing Paul's card and a big bunch of violets. The latter I pinned on my coat and proudly walked up Fifth Avenue. Even Mrs. Grey, busiest of women, remarked on my appearance when I opened the office-door.

"Are those stunning violets the cause or the effect of your regal air this morning?" she smilingly inquired.

I smiled back at her. "Perhaps they're both," I said.

"Well, you look as if you were equal to anything and I'm particularly glad of it. I have some work on hand that I don't dare delegate to any one but you."

"All right, Mrs. Grey," I answered, giving her a hug. "I'm ready to move heaven and earth."

"Oh, it's not so bad as that. It will only take you to New England for a couple of weeks at most." Instinctively my hand went up to the violets. "I want you to go to Boston this afternoon," continued Mrs. Grey, "attend to some business for me in Cambridge to-morrow, and then go on to Bangor, Maine. You will probably be there for ten days or so. On your way back I have another little job for you in a small town near Albany. It will probably mean your staying overnight; if so, you'd better sleep in Albany. There isn't a decent hotel in the other place." Then she explained the details of the mission on which she was sending me.

Before leaving town that afternoon, I sent a hurried note to Paul, giving him the news and my itinerary, as mapped out by Mrs. Grey.

Letters, flowers, books, and candy followed me to each address and—doubtless by their aid—I succeeded in doing what was expected of me. The day I was to leave Bangor for Albany, I received from Paul, by special delivery, a letter saying that he and his mother had been planning for some time to run up to Albany; and, on account of my being there so soon, they had decided to make their visit coincide with mine.

"According to your letter of yesterday," he wrote, "you go from Bangor Thursday afternoon to Boston, sleep there and continue the journey to Albany on Friday. In view of the hour your train arrives in Albany—and right here let me thank you for remembering to mention it, as I requested, so many would have left me wildly guessing—mother and I will take a train from the Grand Central that will land us in Albany in plenty of time for me to get her settled at the hotel before I go to the station to meet you.

"Of course, you will be our guest; so don't telegraph ahead for hotel accommodation for yourself. I'm bossing this job, and all you have to do is to wire me 'O. K.' as soon as you read this. By the way, send the message to me at the Athletic Club, for we've had some trouble about telegrams at the Meriden, and I don't dare run the risk of having a telegram from you held up.

"And don't write mother, dear. She received two letters with bad news from different friends last week, and the very sight of an envelope makes her nervous now. That's why she hasn't already written you herself. I'm the proxy in this case. It needed no urging on my part for mother to agree to go to Albany. She is fonder than ever of you now; in fact, you're a link between her and myself, and she is almost as eager to see you as I am —which is saying a great deal."

From this I inferred that Paul had told his mother; from her coming to meet me, that she was reconciled. Accordingly it seemed that I had nothing left to wish for now and I sent to Paul at the Athletic Club the message he desired.

The work in Bangor was finished half a day earlier than the schedule anticipated; from long study of time-tables, I found that I could make connections that would enable me to reach Albany in the early morning of Friday, instead of afternoon. Thus ample opportunity would be afforded to go to the village indicated by Mrs. Grey, accomplish my errand there if fortune favored, and return to Albany within forty minutes of the time when I was due according to the other plan—and the forty minutes' margin was the right side, too. This arrangement would have the advantage of leaving me with a clear slate when I met Mrs. Forsythe and Paul; and from that time till Monday afternoon, when I was expected in New York, no thought of business should intrude upon the holiday.

To decide upon this plan was to act on it at once. Everything worked like a charm; even the weather contributed its share of sun and warmth and the sweet breath of spring.

CHAPTER XXV

AT ALBANY

THUS it came about that on Friday afternoon I sat in a corner of the railway waiting-room at Albany when Paul Forsythe walked in. I can see him now: not only the women but the men turned to look at him. As for me—unobserved, I seized upon the luxury of watching him, thrilling through and through at his signs of eagerness as he eyed the clock.

Then a shrill voice called out: "Incoming Boston express! Track number seven," and he started for the door leading to the train-shed. I stole after him, and just outside the door caught up with him.

"Paul," I said softly, "Paul."

Even in the crowd he heard me; at the look in his eyes as he turned to welcome me, a warm wave rushed up from my heart to throat and forehead. A few words explained my arrival ahead of schedule time. "And my work's all done," I said.

He took my traveling bag and led the way outside; there he put me in a cab, sprang in himself and shouted to the driver, "Hotel——," Then he leaned back, studying me through half-closed lids.

"How is your mother?"

"Mother? Oh, very well. Very well *indeed.*" In his emphasis I caught a trace of agitation which deepened my own embarrassment under his continued gaze. Throughout our short drive to the hotel, I was conscious of some strangeness in Paul, and, in myself, of some instinctive shrinking. As we entered the hotel, this was

intensified. It was unexplainable; and half angry, half ashamed, I took myself to task with the reminder that in the Meriden, whether Mrs. Forsythe accompanied us or not, I was accustomed to pass in and out with Paul as unconcernedly as I went to business every day. Why should I be so disconcerted by mere change of environment? There was no other difference: Paul's mother was waiting upstairs for us now. But the embarrassment remained.

In the elevator I noticed that Paul was very pale. As we emerged on the fourth floor, he motioned me to the right and paused an instant to suit his step to mine. Halfway down the corridor, a door opposite opened suddenly and a woman darted out.

I halted, with a quick sigh of relief, supposing that it was Mrs. Forsythe on the lookout for her son and me. This was the way she often did at the Meriden. Turning with both hands outstretched, I found myself face to face with an utter stranger.

"Oh, pardon me," I exclaimed. "I—I—thought it was a friend."

At the sound of my voice, Paul, who by this time was a little in advance, hastily retraced his steps. "Did you see somebody you knew?"

I shook my head. "Aren't we—aren't we almost there?"

"Half a minute more," said he, falling into step with me again; and the next I knew he had unlocked a door and was ushering me into a sitting-room. Then he closed the door very quietly and, leaning back against it, put both arms around me and drew me close, asking, with a tremulous smile as he bent his face to mine: "Will this do as well as the Mead's vestibule?"

But the response was not the same. I slipped away from him and walked over to a writing desk. "Why—your mother, Paul?" I stammered, looking around me in bewilderment.

"Oh, that's all right. Mother isn't here—just now," he explained a little incoherently. "Said she had some shopping to do."

"Well, all the more reason then—" I began.

But he cut me short with: "Dorothy, haven't you confidence in me?"

"Why—why—of course. But what a strange question." After a pause I added, "Someway, everything seems strange to-day."

"It won't, if you'll only trust yourself to me," he murmured pleadingly, coming close to me again. Instinctively I recoiled.

At this recoil his manner changed. With sudden fierceness he lifted me high in his arms, then sank down on a chair, forced my head back on his shoulder, and kissed me again and again full upon the mouth.

I fought desperately. "That's not fair. Let me go," I gasped. "I hate you."

"Hate me, do you? Well, pretty soon you won't," he muttered and fell to kissing me again. But someway —just how I do not know—I succeeded in freeing myself at once. With blazing eyes I faced him from the middle of the room.

He rose from the chair, put his hands in his pockets, and planted himself directly between me and the door, still watching my flushed face. "You didn't hate me that evening in the vestibule."

This reference brought vividly to mind the ideal I had so long cherished, the hope trembling, but recently in my heart, the joy that for the last two weeks had been trying its wings.

"Ah, that was a different man," I moaned.

"No, the very same," he said.

"Then I've never understood you."

"You haven't, and it's high time you should. That's why we are in Albany."

This superior tone was the last straw. I drew myself

up to my full height. "Will you kindly explain just what part your mother is to play? Is she in the secret, too?"

"My mother is in New York."

For a long moment I looked at him, slow understanding dawning in my eyes. "So this—*this*—is what you meant?" I walked to the threshold of the half-open door that led into the next room, and glanced in. It was a bedroom.

Then slowly I turned back to the man, who was watching every expression of my face. Through a blur of scorn I said: "And you have lied deliberately."

He shrugged his shoulders. "If you choose to call it that. I acknowledge I deceived you. But I did it for your good. And you'll willingly admit it before we leave this place."

At this I caught up my traveling bag and started for the door leading to the corridor. But he was there before me.

"Unless you open that door and let me go at once," I said in a voice that was my own and yet seemed very far away, "I shall telephone downstairs for help."

"I don't think you will," he answered, very quietly, "for you're too sensible a girl not to foresee the scandal that would cause. It wouldn't matter so much for me, but you can't afford a scandal. We are on the hotel register as man and wife."

In the intensity of stillness, the words seemed to be alive. I trembled from head to foot. "I wonder if you know how I despise you, Paul Forsythe?"

"That's not my name in Albany," he protested, smilingly. "I am Peter Flint. And don't forget your own. You are Mrs. Peter Flint for the present, Dorothy."

I folded my arms and stood looking at him. "I am here alone with you," I said. "What more have you to say?"

"A great deal," he returned, calmly; and then, motioning to a chair: "Sit down. First of all I want to tell you that you have no reason to be afraid of me. I shall not even try to kiss you against your will again. It was only because I had lived for two weeks on the memory of your sweet surrender when I saw you last that your unresponsiveness just now made me forget myself. But that is over and I apologize. Next time you'll come to my arms willingly."

There was a pause, but I gave no sign of hearing him.

"I mentioned a little while ago," he resumed in the same even voice, "that you didn't understand me. And you don't understand yourself, either, Dorothy. I want to help you to do both. I've had this in mind ever since we met last summer at the seashore. Now, I'm going to be very frank with you: I have no intention of marrying you or anybody else. Mother has nobody on earth but me—and, anyway, I prize my liberty. But that's neither here nor there. Liberty does not preclude friendship—friendship of rare flavor and quality." There was another pause. "Are you listening?"

"Yes," I said. But my tone told him nothing.

"As a rule, I have a horror of women under twenty-five. They're crude and raw and the edges stick out. You're twenty-two, but, despite the crudity, the fine material is evident. There's a very appealing freshness about you and a zest for life that's worth cultivating. But it *requires* cultivating; all this vivacity, this verve, this overeagerness, must be toned down. You lack poise, you need experience. Ten years from now—if you have the right training in the meantime—you'll be a woman to be proud of."

He said more in the same strain, watching me narrowly meanwhile—as I understood, although I never raised my eyes—for some indication that his peculiar form of flattery was having its effect. And it was: it

was turning me to adamant. But he didn't perceive it. All his subtlety was gone.

Had he spoken one word of genuine affection, temptation might have assailed me; I might have forgiven the deceit by which he had decoyed me here had anything else rung true. But this is not a story of what might have been. The abyss of insincerity so startlingly disclosed, the cold-bloodedness, the consummate egotism of the man freed me from the thraldom of the flesh, while at the same time it revealed the gravity of the danger which confronted me.

In his promise not to attempt again to kiss me against my will, I trusted no more than I believed his vainglorious assertion concerning my willingness "next time." In other words, I was not—under the circumstances—afraid of myself, but I was afraid of him; and I appreciated, too, in every tingling nerve, that I must not betray the fear, the loathing he inspired. I had angered him once to-day: it would be folly to rouse his wrath again. Yet what was I to do? How could I get away?

In the fixity of musing that ensued, I did not at once perceive that Paul had left off speaking. But at length, the quiet of the room penetrated to my consciousness.

Presently he spoke again. "You'd better take off your hat."

"All right," I replied.

"That's the way to talk," he cried, exultantly. "I always knew you were a thoroughbred."

To gain time I walked over to the mirror. He followed; and as I raised my hands to remove the hatpins, his fingers closed on mine. "Let me," he said.

There were several hatpins and he was a long time finding them. I longed to sink through the floor, but reminded myself that this was no time to dwell on the impossible; I needed all my wits to seize on any opportunity that might be offered for escape.

While he was still hunting for the last hatpin, whose

head was embedded in some tulle beneath the hatbrim at the back, a sharp knock sounded from the direction of the room beyond. This disturbance increased his clumsiness and his determination, too. "I'll find that hatpin," he announced through clenched teeth, "or die in the attempt."

But the knocking still continued, louder than before. It was plain that the intruder was of no mind to accept defeat. With a muttered imprecation, Forsythe finally rushed into the room beyond, flinging wide open the connecting door. Through the mirror I could see clear across the other room and, as Paul opened the outside door to admit the messenger, I caught sight of a passage way. This I understood at once from the position of the rooms was at right angles to the main corridor.

Sooner than it takes to tell it I darted to the hall door of the sitting-room. Beyond it lay the main corridor, avenue of escape! Feeling already the mad throb of liberation, I warned myself to wait till Paul began to parley with the messenger. Then, cautiously, I turned the knob.

The door was locked! Furthermore, the key was gone; doubtless Paul had removed it soon after our entrance, when I was preoccupied with wondering where his mother was. At any rate, the key was gone. And the door was locked.

Immediately Paul called out from the other room: "Come here a minute, Dorothy. The florist's boy has brought something you will like." I obeyed and found a huge box of long-stemmed American Beauty roses addressed to Mrs. Peter Flint. "I ordered these for you this noon and then forgot all about them," he confessed.

Something told me to feign delight. "Oh, thank you, thank you," I cried and then with eager question and comment turned to the boy whom—I couldn't have told why—it was my one thought to detain.

Just then there was a ring at the telephone; the tele-

phone was in the sitting-room. "Suppose you answer that," suggested Paul, "while I pay the boy."

But I buried my face in the fragrance of the flowers. "I can't leave these," I murmured, faint with the vision of escape which was now revealed to me.

"Well, never mind," he rejoined good-naturedly, as one who, confident of success in the main issue, can afford to be magnanimous. "The boy will wait."

After that, it seemed a thousand years till Paul stepped into the sitting-room and I heard him at the telephone. Then, with hands that trembled, I flung the roses to the boy. "Here, hold them," I managed to find voice enough to say. The next instant I was gone.

Down the passage way I sped, clinging with one hand to my hat, which was insecurely fastened with the single hatpin which had baffled the man's search. Whether I really—or only in imagination—heard a door opening and an angry voice calling after me, I do not know. But I ran as if hell-hounds were in pursuit.

Under a vague impression that the elevator was a long way off and that I mustn't meet the elevator boy, I veered sharply to the left at the first turning; but, catching sight of people coming down that corridor, I fled in the opposite direction, not knowing where I went.

Soon I came upon a stairway and breathlessly ran all the way to the ground floor; there, fortunately, I found myself in a quarter of the house far removed from the office and the entrance through which I had passed with Paul. A door stood open. I dashed into the street.

Hailing a cab that happened to be passing, I told the driver to take me posthaste to the railway station; but I spoke so rapidly that he couldn't understand, and there was some delay till he found out what I meant. To me this delay seemed interminable, but it was probably only a short space of time until, at breakneck pace, we were rattling through the streets. Huddled in the hansom, I suddenly remembered that my purse was in my traveling

bag in the hotel; however, in a chamois bag pinned inside my shirt-waist was money enough to pay the cab fare and to buy a ticket to New York.

Arrived at the railway station, I learned that a train was leaving almost instantly. With a glance at the ticket window, where I had no time to take my place in line, I rushed through to the platform, past the blinking gateman and scrambled up the steps of the rear car just as the train pulled out.

After traversing three coaches, I found a seat and sank into it in a state bordering on collapse. At first I could not think of anything; then all at once it seemed to me that in my face he who ran could read the story of the day and find corroboration in my lack of ticket, luggage, gloves.

But furtive inspection assured me that my fellow passengers were absorbed in their own affairs and indifferent to mine. I breathed more easily, and by and by regained a sense of values. What mattered it that I had no ticket? I had money enough to pay my fare. And as for luggage—as for gloves?—Luggage? Gloves? Tears of relief and gratitude welled up in my eyes. What mattered anything on earth but the one fact of escape?

CHAPTER XXVI

INCREASING WEIGHT OF ISOLATION

WHEN I reached the boarding house in West Twenty —— Street, New York, on the return from Albany without gloves or luggage (which followed by express next day), I found awaiting me a week-old letter from Mrs. Forsythe.

"I don't know where you are," she wrote, "nor when you're coming back, though Paul did tell me that you had gone away on business."

Between the lines, I read evidence of her displeasure that I had not "seen fit," as she would have phrased it, to acquaint her with the news myself. She hoped, however, that I should return to town in time to see her before she went away for the summer. The date of her departure was not yet set, she said, nor was the place of her sojourn decided on; but, in the intervals between appointments with the dressmaker, she was weighing the pros and cons of several different localities from which Paul wished her to select and, if the hot weather should come on suddenly, she might come to a decision overnight. "In that case," she warned me, "we probably shouldn't meet again till fall."

From all this I gleaned that, owing to my silence—at Paul's initiative—I was in disfavor now; but that there still remained a chance to return and be forgiven provided I was prompt.

Under the circumstances, nothing could have been more opportune. To meet Mrs. Forsythe at all—which meant running the risk of meeting her son, too—was out

of the question. Through no fault of my own, I was now in her black books: by my own choice there I would remain. Of course, I did not blame the mother for the baseness of the son, but it was impossible to keep up the acquaintance with her now; neither could I bear the thought of staying on in the old surroundings. Accordingly, I left Mrs. Forsythe's letter unanswered and spent all my spare time looking for another boarding place.

A week later a second letter came. This bore the postmark of a summer resort on the Sound, to which, it appeared, the Forsythes had fled on the arrival of the first "hot spell." With some misgiving, I tore open the envelope, but was overjoyed to learn that, because of what Mrs. Forsythe dubbed "a sudden whim of Paul's," mother and son were soon to sail for Europe for an indefinite stay abroad.

"The globe-trotting begins once more," was the way Mrs. Forsythe announced the change of plan, "and I'm dashing off these few lines to say that I must see you before we sail, even if you have been naughty in neglecting me of late. So write at once and let me know your free time between now and the thirtieth."

By return mail I answered this, saying that work was very heavy now and that I couldn't in the least count upon my time in the brief interval before she sailed, especially as it was more than probable that Mrs. Grey would wish to send me out of town again. I thanked Mrs. Forsythe for all her kindness, wished her a good crossing, and brought the letter to a close as quickly and yet as cordially as I could.

She sent me a postcard from the steamer, so I judged she was content; at any rate I was content, as I wrote "Finis" to a chapter, of which I decided with the prompt certainty of youth there could be no possible reopening in the years to come.

Settled in another boarding house half a mile farther uptown, with the Forsythes safely out of the country, I

told myself that life would be just the same as it had been before the beginning of the acquaintance that was now abruptly closed. But it was not the same! The influences of the past year were too far-reaching to be blotted out by willing to forget them and by moving half a mile.

At first, gratitude for my escape from Paul Forsythe dominated every other feeling. But later I began to ask myself why, *why* such an experience as the recent episode in Albany should have come to me—to me who had harmed nobody, who wanted only to be good and strong and brave. Many hours I wasted in resentment, many tears I shed, before I realized that if I could rightly answer that one question "Why?" I should have the key to all the mysteries.

But perhaps—perhaps—I reasoned, it was a test of how much this glibly formulated wish of mine "to be good and strong and brave" really amounted to; gradually I came to see that no one else has power to make or mar the inner life of any individual: in the realm of the spirit, growth depends upon oneself. With this clearer vision, came resolve not to lose sight of it, and the next two years—take them all in all—marked, I think, some gain for me in the things that are worth while.

Outwardly there was little change: one boarding-house hall bedroom differs not much from another; and the business routine was the same, except that, with greater responsibility, I now had a smaller salary than at first.

Mrs. Grey was reported to be a woman of large fortune. But the report was false. Her husband at his death had left her well-provided for, but, since that time, the shrinking of investments in which much of her money was tied up necessitated retrenchment even in the philanthropic work which enlisted her deepest interest. At the start she had carried the entire financial burden of the enterprise and, as the volume of the work increased, there was not corresponding increase in the

number of those whose co-operation took the form of material support. Agitation for woman suffrage was not as popular then as now, and the expenses which our work entailed came to be a heavy drain on Mrs. Grey's resources.

Understanding this, I heartily concurred in the salary reduction which ensued, even though it meant renewal of the harried stress of wherewithal that had marked my college days. I did manage to keep decently clothed and housed and fed, but the slightest of margins remained for the necessary extras which inevitably crop up; and there was no chance of saving for that "rainy day" on which in all forecasts my New England upbringing had laid great emphasis.

And yet money or the lack of it has never been the chief consideration; for me, poverty or wealth is measured by affection, by sympathy. I was bound to Mrs. Grey by ties of love and loyalty, and to desert her at this crisis, even had work that was much better paid been offered me, would have been impossible. She had trained me, had made me valuable to her, and I could not imagine working with anybody else. I still "didn't want to vote," but, as the prospect of votes for women was no nearer than on the day I first declared my attitude, and as I was more occupied with the office routine of philanthropy than with what Mrs. Grey denominated "the educational feature," personal indifference to the franchise was no bar to efficiency.

And so I continued in the employ of Mrs. Grey. There was never the least shadow of discord between us; neither was there, save on very rare occasions, any expression on her part of appreciation. Through overeagerness for such expression, I attached too much importance to the lack of it: as matter of fact, it was not significant. Mrs. Grey was simply too engrossed in business cares to think of the personal side of our relation. I was a machine and, so long as the machine

worked satisfactorily, nothing need be said. Yet in emergencies she could always be depended on to express what at other times she was too busy to think of.

After the salary reduction, I know she never realized —and I could never bring myself to tell her—how I had to struggle to make both ends meet. With no experience of grinding poverty herself, she didn't understand that I moved to a boarding house on the East Side because it was much less expensive than the Thirty —— Street boarding house; that I often walked miles beyond my strength in order to save car fare for some more pressing need; that I omitted luncheon because I could not afford it—in short, that deprivation and denial marked all the daily round. Had she known, she would have managed someway to make things easier, but my lips were tied. I felt that Mrs. Grey, of her own accord, would increase my salary as soon as she was able; until then I must continue to practice the closest economy. It was hard, but such was my nature that the struggle with poverty counted little in comparison with the weight of isolation that grew heavier each year.

Despite my loneliness, I could not make friends with the people in the boarding house. Of course, there was the surface intercourse, the commonplace of courtesy, but for genuine friendship I found no material; at times friendly overtures were made, but something always held me back. It may be that my standards were too high, or that my experience with Paul Forsythe had made me suspicious of people in general; but yet, looking back on those unhappy years, I cannot see that I was more cautious than a young woman alone ought to be, and my failure to form any real friendship seems to me to have been my misfortune, not my fault.

No one who has not been similarly placed can understand the limitations of a young woman's life alone in a great city, particularly when the nature of her employment opens up no social opportunities. In this I do not

by any means intend to intimate that women under such circumstances have a monopoly of isolation: I realize that existence on these terms is hard for young men, too; that any stranger in a metropolis has and must have many lonely hours. But I am telling my own story here, and need not apologize for emphasizing limitations from the feminine point of view.

In my daily work I was interested and discharged every obligation to the best of my ability; but when my work was done there was no relaxation, no diversion, no companionship. I tried to read, but one can't read all the time; I tried to raise the real me above the dead level of routine, the galling proximities of the boarding house, the pettiness of the struggle with poverty. But when one longs with all the warm instincts of youth for somebody, something, some place of her own, it is difficult to keep the mind at all times fixed on such cold abstractions as development of character and one's duty to one's uncongenial neighbors in the boarding house. But I did try.

It is needless to dwell on the efforts of those years, on the atmosphere of gloom that enshrouded me; suffice it to say that there was nothing to feed the devouring hunger in my heart. Of my sister I heard only through the columns of the Manchester newspaper to which I still subscribed for the sake of its occasional mention of her. In due time—four years after my coming to New York—she had graduated from the university, where she afterward pursued a post-graduate course; by this time she had taken the master's degree and was working for the doctorate.

The affection, the thought, that I lavished on Alison would have been impossible, I think, in the case of any older sister whose own emotional life was normal. But I had been so starved and, in the case of Paul Forsythe, so duped, that my heart turned to Alison with more than a sister's love. There was in my feeling for her some-

thing of maternal brooding, a yearning to save her from such experience as mine. But I was powerless: I pondered on the situation day and night; prayed over it, agonized over it, only to decide that I had no right to make myself known to her. Dr. and Mrs. Coles had brought her up in ignorance of her birth; they had given her every advantage; she believed she was their child. I had no right to enlighten her. The truth would be a shock, and doubtless a great grief to her as well. All I could do for Alison was to spare her that suffering and to love her from afar.

CHAPTER XXVII

MRS. MIGGS'S BOARDING HOUSE

THE winter I was twenty-four there was some improvement in my circumstances, owing to an increase in salary with which Mrs. Grey surprised me at New Year's. It would still be necessary for me to exercise great care in money matters, but I had felt so acutely the ugliness and discomfort of the cheap East Side boarding house, that I seized on the opportunity now offered to escape, and resolved to make up for the added cost of living in a better neighborhood by economizing in other directions. Accordingly, I moved to Mrs. Miggs's boarding house in West Fifty —— Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. It was an extremely well-kept house, and the occupants enjoyed a measure of comfort which was luxury in comparison with the atmosphere from which I had just fled.

It was characteristic of me that, under such circumstances, all my buoyancy returned. With one of those swift transitions that are temperamental, I entered on existence in Mrs. Miggs's boarding house as if I were beginning life all over again, bubbling over with health and good spirits, and ready to meet half-way any friendly overtures.

My new acquaintances were better educated and more prosperous than the people I had seen of late, though I found in them no more of sincerity and genuine kindliness. However, they were pleasanter to meet. Except for a middle-aged school teacher who occupied the hall room opposite mine on the top floor, the boarders were

all young married people who for several years had lived under the same roof. As the house was small and two families had a whole floor each, the company was not numerous; judging from the spirit of good-fellowship which pervaded the assemblage at dinner-time, when I saw them first, everybody was on the best of terms with everybody else.

People always mean more to me than books, and in this environment there was interesting material. One of the men, Dr. Post, was a young physician who since then has risen to fame; another, Mr. Earle, was a journalist, resourceful and alert; a third, Mr. Davison, was an advertising man who even at that time was coming into prominence and has now reached the point, I'm told, where he can convince any given individual of anything on earth.

Then, too, there were the wives, though candor compels me to confess that I found them much less interesting. This is not that I am especially disinclined to feminine society, but as I look back upon the people in that boarding house, the men seem to me to have been unusually vital and intelligent, and the women unusually trivial and uncharitable.

At any rate, it was the men who did most of the talking in the dining-room; to be sure, in an occasional lull, the school teacher, into whose soul the red ink had long since entered, made some grim comment on the deadliness of correcting copy-books; or the married women compared fashion notes or criticised other women of their acquaintance. As this did not appeal to me, I paid no attention to their remarks, but listened with all my ears to the worth-while conversation of the men. They spoke with authority on a wide range of topics, and after my experience of an exclusively feminine viewpoint in association with Mrs. Grey, it was refreshing to hear matters of historical significance or contemporary interest discussed by well-informed men. One would defend

one side of a question, another the opposite; and to both I listened with the same attentiveness.

By and by I did more than listen: first I timidly put forth a question on some point that was not quite clear, then ventured a comment of my own; and it wasn't very long before I was regularly included in the talk. For years I had been a great reader, not from any natural tendency toward books, but as refuge from almost intolerable loneliness; in this atmosphere of masculine friendliness, what I had stored away came to the surface now, and I contributed my mite to the interchange of thought.

But it wasn't all so serious as this might indicate. One evening at dinner, I greeted with a chuckle a joke which the other women were too absorbed in a consultation on new gowns to see; evidently this unexpected appreciation on my part encouraged the perpetrator to try again, and when he found that I also enjoyed a joke if it chanced to turn against myself, it spurred him on the more. At the end of a certain sparring match, in which I was worsted, he turned to his wife, who sat glumly looking on.

"I've made a great find," said he. "There's a girl," nodding in my direction, "who can take a joke."

Then it came to be the usual thing, not only for him but for the rest of them, to laugh and joke with me at dinner. But soon I was conscious of a form of feminine hostility which for the life of me I cannot understand.

I think, and have always thought, that any woman who attempts to engage the sentimental interest of another woman's husband, or who encourages any such interest that may have sprung up without effort on her part, deserves only contempt. But it is ridiculous to think of anything like that in connection with this case. Of course, I understand that such friendly footing as that on which I stood with those three men, might have been used as an entering wedge to closer intimacy. But

it was not so used, and even the suggestion is an insult to every one concerned.

So far as I knew, the men were all married happily; but, beyond hoping on general principles that such was the case, I never gave a thought to that side of their lives. I saw them only in the dining-room and showed no partiality for any one of them, but I did make plain my appreciation of the intellectual keenness, the wisdom, and the wit of all of them. Such appreciation seems to me to have been a compliment to the wives themselves, especially when there was not the least reason to suspect a wish on my part to appropriate what belonged to them. I was grateful to those men collectively for the increase of cheerfulness they brought into my life—but that was all. They were as honest as myself, and everything was frank and aboveboard from the first day of our acquaintance to the last.

As soon as I realized which way the wind was blowing with the wives, I made repeated efforts to include them in the conversation, but without success; they wouldn't take the trouble to inform themselves on subjects which held their husbands' interest, and they persistently held aloof from the dinner-table talk while grudging me my share in it.

Had they wished, they could have beaten me at every point, for they had more to do with and more time and money with which to make use of their material. Each of the three was better looking and better dressed than I; each had had a happy home in girlhood, and each now enjoyed the ease and comfort of a sheltered life.

That type of woman is much less often found in boarding houses in New York to-day than she was ten years ago; apartment hotels have sprung up in great profusion since that time, and the husband's steadily increasing means now enable her to surround herself with greater luxury, to gratify much more expensive tastes. But at heart she is the same. She shirks the pains and

responsibilities of child-bearing, she absolutely refuses to be tied down by the cares of keeping house. She lives only to indulge herself. Thus my acquaintances in that boarding house, having no real troubles to endure, must needs invent some, and conjure up a vision of neglect that was utterly devoid of truth.

One evening I was so absorbed in a discussion of profit-sharing experiments that I did not notice when the other women left the room. Later on—how much later I could not then have told—two of them stuck their heads inside the dining-room door; and one of them—the youngest and prettiest in the house—called out:

"The card tables are ready whenever you boys can tear yourselves away from Miss Baldwin's society." The words in themselves were harmless enough; it was the tone, and the smile with which they were accompanied, that gave them significance.

Her husband stopped short in his argument and turned to her with a frown. "There's loads of time," he said. "Don't be in such a rush."

The other woman's husband waved his hand and laughed. "Run along, Little Bright Eyes. We'll be there by and by."

But I had already risen and, when I had a chance to speak, stammered, in embarrassment, "Good night—good night." Supposing that at least it was nine o'clock, I murmured apologetically, "I had no idea it was so late."

"But is *isn't* late," one of the men protested, holding up his watch. "Seventeen minutes of eight—and we're going to finish our argument. What's the matter with you girls anyway? Here, Miss Baldwin, come back." With a flourish he pulled out my chair. "As I was saying, when I was interrupted——"

With the discovery that the hour was even earlier than the usual time for finishing dinner my apologetic attitude died a sudden death and something uglier was born. "Not to-night, thank you," I said, pausing on the

threshold. "Some other time, perhaps, when these ladies," with a smile that matched their own, "will honor us with their company."

From that evening I never lingered at the dinner-table after the other women had left the room; nor had it been by any means my custom heretofore, but occasionally some discussion had arisen and, when the others, wearying of the talk, withdrew, I remained to urge on the combatants and see which side would triumph—but this was the last of it!

While I was indignant that they should call us to account—or call me to account, for, of course, they considered me the real offender—I also understood that a young woman alone is always under suspicion in the eyes of somebody, and that possibly such lingering to share the conversation in the dining-room—although it was a public place and one boarder had as much right there as another—might be looked upon even by disinterested eyes as a trespass on forbidden ground. Accordingly, I now denied myself the innocent diversion of an after-dinner chat.

But that made no difference in the situation, after all; the women didn't like me, nor did I like them. In the first place, there were temperamental differences which would militate against much sympathy; but that wasn't the whole of it.

What they envied me for I'm sure I do not know, but I was influenced by proximity to lives that were so much easier than my own. It wasn't the material comfort that I coveted nor their freedom from the task of self-support; it was the companionship, the affection, that I saw so close at hand, which emphasized the desolation of my own existence. Unquestionably I ought not to have brooded on the unequal gifts of fate; but I have no wish to make myself out better or stronger than I was, and I did brood on the contrast in our lives. Furthermore, to tame the human heart takes time. And the

memory of those years, when I habitually cried myself to sleep, haunts me even now.

When I returned to the boarding house of stormy evenings, weary and bedraggled after a long day of hard work, rounded out by battling with the crowds for standing room in the Elevated train, and trudged up to my room often too exhausted to go down to dinner, the sight of those three women fresh and rosy, dressed as daintily as dolls, chatting gayly with their husbands on the way downstairs, was more than I could bear with equanimity. Sometimes it is the little things that affect us most, and I remember to this day the swish of their silk petticoats when at the same time I heard, as I mounted wearily from step to step, the water gurgling in my own wet shoes.

It wasn't that I grudged those women their happiness, but I wanted my own share: all the more fiercely, perhaps, because of the conviction that there wasn't any share for me; that there had been a misdeal somewhere, and I had been left out. Whether there was something in my nature from the start to account for the belief that what I wanted most was and would ever be beyond my reach, or whether it was something grafted on by the somber experiences of my life thus far, I do not know; but at any rate there is no doubt of the reality of my conviction, nor of my vehement determination to hide it from the world. Not only would I not acknowledge kinship with "the race who hawk their sorrows in the market place," but I would shield the real suffering self from detection by any prying eyes. If I could not be happy, at least I would wear the garb of happiness.

Accordingly, I exerted myself to convey at all times the impression of cheerfulness, and I believe that I succeeded. In part the motive was altruistic; display of cheerfulness seemed to me to pertain to the higher morality. But there was a selfish motive, too; a foolish pride which scorned to admit defeat. I was never the

kind of woman to stoop to verbal falsehood and deceit; but my manner in public, while inwardly I was seething in rebellion at my fate, habitually implied content with all the world. In the seclusion of my own room at night, I could abandon the disguise, but elsewhere I clung to it.

I myself believe—though at the time I had no idea of it—that the joyous manner I assumed, with its implication of riding the top crest of the wave of prosperity and happiness, was unconsciously a protest against daily contact with numberless examples of self-confessed defeat.

My work, as I have said, threw me entirely among women. In the early days, I went into the homes of the very poor. When Mrs. Grey decided later on that my time could best be spent in the office, women from the tenements came to consult me there. There, too, at intervals came women from uptown on one errand or another, for our office grew to be a kind of clearing house for many philanthropic interests. Some of the visitors were professional women, busy all day long, but not too busy to exert themselves for the girls of the tenements; others of the visitors were of the very rich, whom ennui or some impulse of benevolence sent spasmodically to work on the East Side.

The point of all this is that I was brought in contact with many different types of women, the majority of them unmarried. With their financial weal or woe I am not here concerned, though in many cases the struggle to keep soul and body together was pitiful enough. But that is another story. I am dealing here with heart interest.

Suffering so keenly from loneliness myself, I was alert for signs of similar suffering in others; many of the women talked freely to me, and in other cases I could read between the lines. My sympathy was profound, but I was also impressed with the lack of spirit many of

those women showed; no matter what their age, they had a resigned way of speaking, of moving about, of looking at one, as if life had worn down to the ragged edge their powers of resistance.

Now the sight of this, while it strengthened my rebellious attitude toward the isolation of their lives and mine, also deepened my resolve not to be daunted by the worst that fate could do. On the street, in the surface cars, in the Elevated trains, I was always seeing some woman—sometimes young, sometimes middle-aged—who I knew was, like myself, half dead of loneliness. My heart ached for her, but I could scarcely keep from whispering to her: "Don't, dear, *don't* let people see. They'll only laugh. Just play the game of make-believe till it becomes reality. If we keep on saying 'I don't care,' by and by it will be the truth."

We hear much nowadays of feminine emancipation, of the danger of "cultivating the head at the expense of the heart." Indeed, an audience listening to some advocate of the "new" womanhood, might almost be pardoned for supposing that the nature of woman had been strangely changed since the Lord God made her to be the helpmate of the man. But it isn't changed! Despite surface differences—due to the material progress of the race—between us and our great-great-great-great grandmothers, despite the fads and fancies which from time to time ripple the surface of public opinion, despite the preachers who from fashionable pulpits attack the "vices" of the modern woman, despite the rampant reformers who berate the sex for its alleged refusal to bear as many children as it should—despite all this, the fact remains that the mass of women are now essentially as they have ever been. That some women have unworthy standards and lead ignoble lives is unquestionably true, but that the majority to-day crave anything except the normal life of wife and mother—the kind of life that best benefits humanity—is false.

It is just this craving, as I experienced it myself and observed it in the many, many unmarried women I knew well in the years I lived alone in the City of New York, that is the keynote of the tragedy.

Fiction and the drama have often depicted the fate of her who gives up the struggle, who turns aside from the narrow path of single combat to what one modern dramatist has called "The Easiest Way." We are all familiar with her story, and from the moral that it points I would not eliminate one atom of significance. But what of the other woman who, with a nature perhaps as luxury-loving as her sister's, with temptations quite as plentiful, with longings for affection grown more intense because unsatisfied, single-handed fights to the last ditch?

There are thousands of such women in New York who, for all the social opportunities they have, might as well be stranded on a desert island. Country-born and bred, of high ideals, robust health and trained intelligence, they are drawn in early years to the metropolis, realizing not at all the loneliness that awaits them there. Of course, for many women romance does bud in city street as well as country byway: for the moment each is lovers' lane. But there are many, many other women for whom the moment never comes. I know, for I have seen them and they have told me. I have seen them, too, and they have not told me. But by the fevered, unhopeful waiting in their eyes, I knew.

Human nature is everywhere the same, but conditions are different. In New York the machinery of life is more complicated than elsewhere on this continent; the commercial spirit dominates, artificial standards are set up. Every condition of city life militates against the many close acquaintanceships which obtain in country communities; and for a young girl, who has no relatives or friends to smooth her path and make her acquainted with desirable men and women, to come to the metropolis to earn her living is a desperate experiment.

Even granted that she is equal to the mere struggle for existence, able in the face of the fiercest competition to forge ahead and make a place for herself in business or one of the professions, she knows nothing of the loneliness it costs. She may—she *may*—attain considerable measure of worldly prosperity: but prosperity and happiness are not synonymous. And she *may* marry happily. But under conditions such as I have set down here, especially if her employment has thrown her entirely among women, the chances are all against it. By the time she understands the needs of her own nature and realizes how little the city has to offer for the hunger of the heart, she has lost her chance to establish herself in a home elsewhere, and at the same time she has made no headway in New York. Matrimonially speaking, she has "sinned away her day of grace."

One fact that has a bearing on this unhappy state of things is, I think, the traditional "proper" attitude of youthful femininity toward matrimony itself. We know —or we might know if we stopped to think—that the institution is indispensable, that with all the imperfections which it shares in common with other human institutions, it still best exemplifies the sanity and wisdom of the race; that for the vast majority it represents the only way to live if life is to be worth living and the individual is to attain the highest possible efficiency and usefulness. But yet every mother's daughter is brought up to act—or at least to *talk*—as if she were determined to ignore it! In our hearts we loathe the possibility of spinsterhood, but in our conversation we prate much of the "independence" of the bachelor girl.

It is only the little children who are really frank. When in college, I taught district school. One rainy Saturday afternoon, two little girls who were among my pupils came to call on me. They were seven years old, and the woman with whom I boarded brought into the room a big blue plate of chicken sandwiches. The chil-

dren and I seized on them eagerly, and the pile dwindled soon; at last only one sandwich remained. Each child looked longingly at it, and I urged each in turn to take it: each silently and sadly shook her head. But by and by one little girl furtively reached out her hand in the direction of the big blue plate. Her fingers had almost closed on the solitary sandwich, when the other seven-year-old gasped: "Oh, you'll be an old maid! Don't, Helen!" And Helen didn't.

I cannot see why any self-respecting young woman should hesitate to admit a general wish to make the right kind of marriage, any more than to acknowledge the desirability of having pure air to breathe; though in my own early years I would have died rather than confess it, and since then I have witnessed countless instances of similar hypocrisy in others. I'm not advocating a shrieking from the housetops of the slogans, "Give me marriage or give me death," or "A man at any cost," nor a proclaiming of one's fondness for any given individual; there is no danger, I believe, that any self-respecting girl will cause the shrinking violet to blush with shame. But I do plead for honesty of attitude toward the institution as a whole. At present we are hedged about with hypocrisy. And the sooner we have done with it and face facts as they are, the sooner we shall gain in reverence—and be better fitted to do a woman's work.

Where lies the responsibility for the conditions that confront us in the cities, I do not know. I have no remedy to propose; but manifestly there is something wrong somewhere, when thousands of the women best fitted to be wives and mothers, women who are genuinely interested in the betterment of the race, are, from lack of opportunity to meet suitable mates, doomed to live alone.

As if that were not enough, existence is made still harder by the thoughtlessness and selfishness of the lookers-on. From some, the spinster must endure half-con-

temptuous pity, from others open ridicule. Any woman who is happily married should fall upon her knees every day she lives and give thanks for her good fortune. But she doesn't do it.

Here and there, perhaps, is one who does, one whose felicity bears fruit in gentleness and sympathy for those who are alone, but—I speak from long experience—this is unusual. Often with mild wonder, oftener with frank unconcern, oftenest with amusement do happy women regard the plight of their unhappy sisters. Married women as a class take everything for granted and plume themselves on their good fortune, as if unaided they had accomplished some meritorious deed. To their unmarried acquaintances they give the most astounding exhibitions of self-complacency. For that matter even the most unfortunate of wives, she who has made the greatest muddle of her own affairs, who may perhaps have been pouring her grievances into some matron's sympathetic ears, is changed, as if by magic, on the entrance of a spinster; her dejection vanishes at once and, from superior heights of wisdom and experience, she begins to patronize the new arrival. But when the husband is prosperous, when the wife is proud of him, there are no limits to her self-esteem.

Thus in the West Fifty —— Street house, the three married women whom I have mentioned lost no opportunity to snub me because I was less fortunate than they. Despite their dislike of me, they did not hesitate in the absence of their husbands to consult me about many things. At first I wondered why; for even then I realized that it was not respect for my opinion that sent them knocking on my door. "But, Miss Baldwin," they would say, "you don't know anything of life." And no matter what the subject of discussion, some one of the three would invariably bring up with this: "Let me tell you, as a married woman," etc.

Now, of course, this was a sore point with me. But I

don't think they ever detected it; though naturally they realized on general principles that any woman would rather be married than alone. All my life I had practiced concealment as a means of self-defense, and by this time—when I was twenty-four years old—I was rarely surprised into betraying what I wished most of all to hide.

Beginning in childhood with the fierce shielding from observation of my longing for my absent sister, I overreached the mark in college where, far from revealing my fondness for Philip, I avoided him to such extent that it was noticeable among those who saw me most. They believed that I disliked him. The acquaintance, too, with Paul Forsythe which ended—for the time, at least—in the episode at Albany, had still further fostered the impulse toward secretiveness; and since then, with the emotional starvation which confronted me on all sides of life, there grew to equal intensity determination to conceal it from the eyes of every one. As much as possible I avoided Mrs. Post, Mrs. Earle, and Mrs. Davison; but when our meeting was inevitable, I forced myself to be calm and suave.

Aunt Jane—my mother's aunt who at grandfather's brought me up after my mother's death—was, as I have said before, a stern, forbidding woman. She seemed to owe the world a grudge. One of my earliest memories is that of overhearing, in a conversation of grown-ups at the post office one day, a reference to my Aunt Jane as an "old maid." I had never heard the term before, and to my childish mind it not unnaturally represented all that was unlovely in person and character. I supposed that all "old maids" were like Aunt Jane and a new terror was thus added to my idea of life.

Later wisdom corrected this, but the sight of any one who seemed to owe the world a grudge was always repellent to me; and from the day when the suspicion first came over me, that I, too, was doomed to lifelong

loneliness, I fought against displaying resentment or acerbity.

While in college, I read somewhere, "Only small natures allow life to embitter them," and this made a great impression on my mind; and so, although I could not trample underfoot the indignation that sprang up when those three women snubbed me because my life was less full than their own, I could and did keep it from appearing on the surface. Outwardly, at least, I was unmoved, and though the effort to appear so may have been prompted in part by foolish pride, by the wish not to let the enemy find out where I was vulnerable, I believe that it was also in some measure due to a motive that was worthier.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THEODORE PRIME

THUS the long weeks passed, bringing on the spring. One morning before breakfast, Mr. and Mrs. Earle, in their large front room which my small hall room adjoined, mentioned some entertainment which they were that evening to attend. The partition between the rooms was thin; in addition, there was a connecting door, and unless my neighbors cautiously conversed I could not help hearing what they said. Several times I had told them of this in the hope of saving both sides embarrassment; but Mrs. Earle had a high-pitched voice, and her husband's voice, though low, was of penetrating quality. Any one who has ever had a part—especially a hall-room part—in the utilitarian existence of a boarding house, knows how much of one's neighbor's privacy one inevitably shares.

"Suppose we take Miss Baldwin along to the blow-out to-night?" suggested Mr. Earle. "That girl doesn't have any fun."

Ominous silence greeted this. I coughed as loud as I could to let them know that I was there; being in the midst of dressing, I couldn't run away.

Then Mrs. Earle indignantly burst out, "Not *much!* If she goes I stay at home."

The man laughed. "You women are a jealous bunch, aren't you?"

Again there was silence and again I coughed. A moment later Mrs. Earle exclaimed dramatically, and I

knew how her eyes flashed, "You must choose between us!"

To this her husband unsentimentally replied, "Don't be a fool. I only thought it would be decent to show her a good time for once. I'll bet she doesn't know a soul outside this house."

"Well, we're not responsible," insisted Mrs. Earle. And the incident was closed.

About Easter Mrs. Miggs, the landlady, announced that soon a young architect was coming to the house for table board. To admit outsiders to her dining-room was in violation of Mrs. Miggs's strict rule, but she gave us all to understand that there were extenuating circumstances in this young man's case; his mother and herself had been girls together in Iowa, and ever since the landlady married and came East to live, over thirty years before, she had kept up correspondence with her friend; having now no room to offer to the son, the least that she could do was to find lodging for him in the neighborhood and have him come to her house for his meals.

All this she told us and expressed the hope that her "family"—as she called the boarders—would be cordial to the stranger and make him feel at home. She had never seen him, she admitted, but was confident that his mother's son could not fail to be a desirable addition to the company.

At this the three married men winked at me as if to say, "Here's your chance, Miss Baldwin," and even the manner of their wives took on a tinge of cordiality. For a week before the advent of Mr. Prime, my experience was not unlike that of a girl in a houseful of brothers who scent a "beau" in the distance and conduct themselves accordingly. The young man's future and my own figured largely in the conversation at dinner—an occasion when Mrs. Miggs was in the kitchen carving and superintending the serving of the meal—and never had I entertained so poor an opinion of the mental cali-

ber of those men as in that week when, seeing that their mention of the Westerner who was soon to join us teased me, they would talk of nothing else.

"I'm making the most of my opportunities," Dr. Post called out to Mr. Davison, who came in one evening while the physician and myself were in the midst of an animated discussion at dessert.

"Right you are," said Mr. Davison. "When Young Lochinvar gets here, there'll be nothing doing in our line."

"Lochinvar!" I exclaimed. "H'm! He's most likely a cowboy and has never seen anything except a ranch."

"Ranch?" queried Mr. Earle. "The very thing for you. You know you like an outdoor life. Don't I hear you punishing the dumb-bells every morning because you haven't time to walk ten miles? Well, you won't need dumb-bells when you get out on the ranch."

" 'Ranch' sounds good to me," Mr. Davison joined in.

"Say, will you invite us all to visit you? It would be a bully place for a vacation."

"Yes, two weeks would go a long way on a ranch," Dr. Post agreed. "By the broncho route."

"That reminds me," Mr. Earle thoughtfully stroked his chin, "suppose you just set aside a few perfectly good, gentle bronchos for the use of your tenderfoot friends. Lochinvar might be careless with us. Will you?"

They all looked at me and of course I blushed.

"Lochinvar," I muttered contemptuously. "Why don't you call him Jesse James and be done with it?"

"Oh, Lochinvar suits us," was the reply; so "Lochinvar" it was till they shortened it to "Lock," which in turn dwindled soon to "L."

"For you know, an ell is an addition," explained Mr. Davison, the advertising man, "and we have Mrs. Miggs's own word for it that 'L' will be an addition to the company."

Hearing so much talk about him in advance, I was not unnaturally prejudiced against the man; furthermore, the impression conveyed by what Mrs. Miggs herself had said was that of an unsophisticated youth who, before leaving his prairie home for the first time, had appealed to his mother's friend to find a place for him to lay his weary head on arriving in New York. This seemed to me to indicate that he was inefficient; and, with my customary promptitude, I decided that he was unworthy of regard: for self-reliance was a quality I much admired in man.

In due time Mr. Theodore Prime arrived and turned out to be a great surprise. He was of medium height, with a close-knit, wiry figure which at once impressed you with a notion of his strength. Indeed, there was something almost belligerent in his appearance; in his coal-black hair and the expression of his eyes; in the short bristling mustache. You made up your mind the first time you looked at him that he had fought his way through life with bulldog tenacity. He was under thirty, but his face was deeply lined; and yet when he smiled—it wasn't often—his expression was so changed, that you modified your own opinion in so far as to believe that, despite his evident ability to hold his own in any fight, the best of all his victories had been owing to his smile.

I could see that Mrs. Miggs, who had looked forward to his coming, was somewhat disappointed; instead of playing a pseudo-maternal rôle, she was forced to content herself as best she could with keeping an eye on him from afar. It came out later that, instead of having appealed himself to Mrs. Miggs to find a boarding place for him, he had consented to eat at her house only after much pleading on his mother's part. The poor woman hoped by that means to keep in touch with him.

At the start his attitude to all of us was that of a young man bored. He made brief, almost curt responses to the remarks which the men of the household, mindful

of the landlady's request, addressed to him; and then the men ignored him. That roused him, and presently he exerted himself to be agreeable; and when he exerted himself I defy any one to find fault with the results. By the magic of his smile and the charm of what he said, he pleased everybody when he cared to talk.

When he didn't care to talk, it was plainly evident and no one tried to draw him into conversation then. As time went on, he fitted into his own place; the men appeared to like him on the whole, and the married women vied with each other in calling to the surface "that fascinating smile." But for some reason I wasn't favorably impressed: the brusqueness which at times he showed was something new to me. It differed from the habitual good nature of the other men at Mrs. Miggs's, and was such a contrast to the remembered suavity of Paul Forsythe, that I didn't quite know what to make of it; though, as I recalled what depths of baseness lurked beneath Paul's surface smoothness, I was conscious of a swift rebound of friendliness for Mr. Prime. "Better bluntness and decency," I said, "than polish and deceit."

This feeling was never stronger than on the day of my first long talk with him alone. I had already seen much of him in company; with others of Mrs. Miggs's household, we had both been members of a theater-party which Dr. and Mrs. Post gave to celebrate their wedding anniversary in April, and had participated in several week-end outings, but this was my first afternoon alone with him.

The place was Travers Island, where we went for the games of the New York Athletic Club. The day was perfect and the programme full of interest; but as I sat there looking down from the club-house balcony, the contests before me were cast into shade by the more thrilling events the man beside me was relating from his own experience.

"Yes, I've always been a fighter," he confessed.

"I've had to be. My father kicked me out of doors when I was thirteen years old."

"But why?" I gasped.

"Because he was a drunken brute."

I shuddered. "What did you do? Where did you go?"

"First to Des Moines, later to Chicago. I never went home again for twelve years—till my father died."

"But your mother? She must have missed you terribly."

Prime gave a short laugh. "Oh, there were plenty more. My being away made one mouth less to feed. Most of the time dad was out of work. Even when I was a little shaver, I sent ma money, a dollar in a letter now and then; after awhile it was a good deal more, and when dad kicked the bucket it was up to me to support the family. I tried to manage it from the Chicago end, but it was a long ways off; so I gave up my job and made tracks for home, where I knew I could get work. But mother—well—she married again inside a year and I didn't get along with the stepfather any better than I did with the first, so I lit out for keeps this time and went back to Chicago. Ma's second doesn't drink, I'll say that for him, but he's got an ugly disposition and—and so have I at times."

A little disturbed by the tone the talk had taken, I attempted to dispel it by asking lightly, "This isn't one of the times, is it?"

"No," he said as he looked away; and I was struck by something in his manner and his voice. But presently he turned to me and smiled, and it was as if the sun that had been behind a cloud had suddenly come out again.

Before the afternoon was over, he told me much of his Chicago life. He had had many ups and downs, had worked first and last for many architects. He mentioned their names. The names meant nothing to me, but I was impressed by the variety.

"Why so many?" I inquired.

"Oh, I don't know. Guess I'm naturally a rolling stone. Never have any trouble—like pa did—to get a job. I'm a crackerjack in my line, you understand." Then he told me that he had won three competitive prizes for designs for public buildings and—what I had heard before from Mrs. Miggs—that his reason for coming East this spring was to form a partnership with a New York architect.

"I knew him in Chicago. But he was a New Yorker born and bred and couldn't rest easy till he got back East again. So here we are, and we've hung out our shingle with the best of 'em. You must come down and see our offices some day. They're in the peachy class, all right—my partner's father has the coin—but once in awhile, as I look at all that elegance, it comes over me that some day I shall put the whole place on the bum. I don't suppose you ever felt like that?"

"No," I said. "I never did."

"Well," his lips twitched, "you thank your lucky stars."

While many of his confidences startled me, I was interested in all of them and full of sympathy for the struggles of his early life. But there was no danger of my falling in love with him. On the contrary, despite the conviction that he deserved great credit for what he had accomplished in the face of obstacles, there was an intangible something that kept me from wholly liking him.

And yet there was nothing to object to in his manner when he was with me. I have said that he was blunt, but bluntness did not prevent him from being most respectful and considerate. I had the feeling that many of his women friends had been much more free and easy than I was, and that he wanted me to understand he really "knew how to treat a lady," as he would have said.

When the warm weather came on in earnest I saw

even more of Mr. Prime. His partner lived in Jersey, and I gathered that he didn't care for his partner's family; or perhaps they didn't care for him. At any rate, Mr. Prime was usually in New York. For two months, beginning with the middle of June, some one of the three couples at our boarding house was on vacation, and those of us who remained formed the habit of keeping each other company. I had less regard for Mr. Prime than for the other men; but, as he was the only bachelor in the party and I was the only unmarried girl, to his lot it fell to take care of me on our summer-evening jaunts.

Almost all the houses in this part of West Fifty —— Street were private residences and had been boarded up since May. At the Sixth Avenue end of the block, were several boarding houses; even one of these was closed, and, though Mrs. Miggs prided herself on keeping her house open "for the convenience of her family," she assured us that she did so at no small financial loss.

With more time on her hands, the landlady now had greater opportunity to show her interest in her old friend's son. When the school-teacher went away at the end of June, Mrs. Miggs urged him to move into the vacant room. But he refused, insisting that he was very well off where he was; his evident determination not to have her keeping tabs on him and writing to his mother what time he came in of nights was a sore disappointment to the landlady, but she regarded with approving eye his attentiveness to me.

"You have such a good influence on Theodore," she remarked to me one morning at breakfast, when no one else was in the room. "I was writing to his mother yesterday that she needn't worry a mite about him now. It's a great relief to me that you're going to be in town all summer. Not that I'm mistrusting Theodore," she went on hastily, as one who fears that she has said too much, "but young men have so many temptations in a city like New York."

Mrs. Miggs meant well, but she only succeeded in antagonizing Mr. Prime; and to my commiseration for the struggles of his early life was added sympathy for the nagging to which he was subjected now. He roused no sentimental interest in me; but I was a very lonely girl with a keen zest for life, and welcomed the diversion that his society supplied; furthermore, by this time I had learned to take people as I found them and not expect too much. However, his experiences, so different from my own, were more entertaining than any book I knew; I was always wondering what he would do next. Then, too, it may be that I plumed myself a little on being a restraining influence in this young man's life; and if a girl can only believe—whether there is ground for the belief or not—that she is helping a young man, that she is keeping him out of mischief, she is sure to look upon him with some degree of favor.

CHAPTER XXIX

A MIDSUMMER SATURDAY

AT all events, by midsummer we were excellent friends. For several years, in lieu of a regular vacation, I had had a half holiday every other Saturday from June until September. It was necessary for some one in authority to be at the office every week day all day long, but Mrs. Grey and I took turns at a breathing spell.

One sweltering Saturday in August, when every one who could had gone out of town, I was hurrying at half past one o'clock to keep a luncheon appointment with Mr. Prime. His office was uptown and mine was on the lower East Side; it was a little uncertain just when I should be at liberty, so, in order to save time and exertion for us both on such a broiling day, we had agreed that I should meet him at a French restaurant down town.

The time was set for one o'clock, "or as soon after one as I can get there," I reminded him. Our plan included a cool, leisurely luncheon and afterward a sail, provided a breeze should spring up by then, with perhaps a roof garden later and a drive when the night began to cool.

"But we won't have any cast-iron programme," he had said that morning after breakfast, when we left the house together, "it'll depend on how we feel."

That suited me. Indeed, almost anything suited me, so long as I was not alone. Just to mingle with the crowds, to watch the diners in the restaurants, to hear

some music, to walk or drive or sail—it was all the same to me, provided there was some reasonably congenial individual on hand to keep me company. I had been so much alone that the change now was like an oasis in the desert. And so, hurrying to the restaurant where Mr. Prime awaited me I was full of pleasant anticipations, though a little disturbed, as well, by the consciousness that I was late.

As he started up to meet me, instinctively I drew back; if, in view of my tardiness, I hadn't looked for "the fascinating smile" so popular with the feminine members of Mrs. Miggs's household, neither was I prepared for surliness. "I've been waiting half an hour," he exclaimed, scowling.

"I'm sorry," I replied, "but you know I warned you I might be detained."

"Well," he muttered, "I didn't suppose it was going to be like this."

"Neither did I," I said slowly, my tone expressing the full measure of amazement at his manner and his words. He had been blunt before, but this was something new.

For some reason he couldn't let the matter drop. As he conducted me to the table which he had reserved, he continued in a tone of voice that drew the attention of every one to us, "Of course, if I had had any idea that you couldn't separate yourself from that bunch of women before this, I'd have gone down there and dragged you away. I got through by twelve to-day and there was nothing for it but to kill time here."

How he had "killed time" was becoming plainer to me with every word he said; it needed not the smell of his breath as he bent toward me across the small table, nor the shifting of his eyes to make me understand. I had never seen him like this, I had heard nothing definite concerning him; and in a city like New York a girl, who has no parents or other relatives to investigate a man,

knows just as much about his habits as he cares to have her know.

"You've kept me waiting so long that you'll have to be mighty nice to make up for it, miss," he said; and then to the waiter, "A couple of Martinis—dry."

When the waiter disappeared I asked, hoping to save argument on his return, "What made you order two?"

"I don't intend to drink alone," was his reply.

"Well, you know, water is all I drink. I never tasted a Martini in my life."

The lines about his mouth deepened. "You never can begin any younger than to-day."

"I never shall begin at all," said I.

He laughed unpleasantly and nothing more was said just then. When the cocktails were set before us he raised his glass and motioned me to do the same with mine.

Slowly I shook my head.

"Ah, be a sport," he urged. "You don't know what you miss."

Once more I declined.

"Well," he sighed a little, "here's to happy days," and gulped down the contents of the glass. Then he leaned back in his chair and sat there eying me in a way I didn't like. "You're looking out of sight," he said at length; then he reached across the table for the second cocktail and hastily drank that.

Such was the beginning of the luncheon. The food throughout was plentiful, and with every course Prime partook of some different kind of drink. He insisted that as I refused to join him in "a harmless social glass," the responsibility devolved on him to drink enough for two.

The place was well filled when we entered, but long before we left there were few to witness my embarrassment. All through luncheon Prime had much to say; once when the waiter brought on a certain course, he

sent it back, on the ground that the waiter was interrupting him. "When I get through telling the story of my life, I'll let you know," he said. The waiter grinned and hastily withdrew.

At last the meal was finished, the cigar was smoked, the check was paid—and it was almost five o'clock. My only wish was to get out of the restaurant and then home as soon as possible, but I anticipated difficulty; at least I knew that I must count on long arguments before Prime would agree to any plan of mine; naturally, for the sake of both of us, I wanted to avoid a scene, and I also believed that I could manage him alone, that everything would work out well if I could once get him in a cab; for myself—I always used the street-cars, but he was in no state for street-cars now. Trying to keep out of my voice any indication of this fact, I proposed a cab.

"Of course," he snarled. "Think I don't know how to treat a girl? Certainly a cab." He rose and, standing by the table, swayed a bit. I sprang to my feet and put out one arm to steady him.

But he brushed me angrily aside. "Where's that damned waiter?"

The waiter hurried forward. "Right here, sir," he said.

"Well, get me a hansom and be quick about it."

While we stood in the doorway, waiting, I noticed that a thunder-storm was imminent. "I hope we can get home before it rains," I said, looking anxiously at the clouds.

"Home?" sneered Prime. But the hansom drove up then and he went through the motions of helping me in; then he got in beside me. "You're not going home."

"But I must," I cried.

An ugly look came into the man's eyes. "You're a stubborn piece," he said. "You had your own way in the restaurant. It's my turn now."

The cabby lifted the trapdoor in the top. "Where to, sir?"

"Oh, drive up Broadway till I tell you to stop—and drive slow."

By the time we reached Madison Square the mutter of distant thunder grew louder, vivid lightning flashed; every one in the park at our right and in the streets was scurrying to shelter. Then the storm broke in earnest: the rain came down in sheets.

Prime pushed up the trapdoor in the roof and shouted to the driver, "Fifth Avenue Hotel." Almost sooner than it takes to tell it, we were again seated at a small table with a waiter hovering near.

"Don't want anything to eat," said Prime, thrusting aside the menu card. "Full's a goat now. Bring us two highballs—one rye, t'other Scotch. Which will you have, my dear? God knows I've done my best to please you by ordering 'em both."

I only looked at him.

When the waiter brought the drinks, Prime devoured them one after the other and then started in to berate the man, asserting that he had served an inferior brand of rye instead of the one ordered.

The waiter denied the charge and Prime in turn accused him more emphatically. I sat there, trembling and ashamed. An older woman, or even one younger who was more worldly wise, would have found some way out of her predicament. But I seemed powerless.

All at once, however, Prime put an end to the dispute. "Come on out of here," he said to me, as he paid the reckoning. "We'll go uptown and get some beer."

The thunder and lightning had now ceased, but it was still raining hard when the cab that had been summoned drew up at the curb, the driver huddled in his rubber cape.

"Pabst's, in Forty-Second Street," said Prime to him —this was before the days of the Subway in New York—

and then attempted to assist me into the vehicle. The attempt amounted to a push so violent that, once on the step, I fell against the door; then he tumbled in after me. I regained my balance and seated myself as far from him as possible.

But at best it wasn't far; and when the door was slammed together and the glass had been let down in front to keep out the rain, he turned to me. And I realized that we were in close quarters.

"Here," he commanded, his breath hot on my face, "give me a kiss."

"How dare you?" I cried, flinging up both arms as a barricade.

"You won't, hey? Well, I'll—I'll—" his utterance was a little thick, "I'll help myself to as many as I please."

With this he set his teeth, seized me by the shoulders, and bent his face to mine; drink had maddened him, but it also made him clumsy and slow. I shook myself free of his hold, ducked my head far forward—and his kisses fell on my coat-sleeve and my hat.

Then, muttering and cursing under his breath, he took a new clutch on me and succeeded in pinioning both my arms; with one elbow he forced my head violently back and for an instant held it motionless. But before his lips reached mine, I wriggled my arms free and pushed his face away.

All of a sudden the hansom lurched heavily to the left and there was a sound of interlocking wheels and two angry drivers shouting at each other in the rain. Prime let go of me and peered through the window at the side; soon the trouble outside was righted and we started on.

Glancing furtively at Prime, I saw that he had caught sight of himself in the small mirror and was attempting to straighten his tie. Suddenly the driver pulled up short; after a pause, the glass slide was raised and the door was opened. But the man did not stir and I sat

rigid, too. I had made up my mind under no circumstances to alight till I reached the boarding house. It was bad enough to be alone with Prime; to appear with him at any public place was now impossible.

The driver called down from above. "Here we are, sir. Pabst's."

"Don't like the looks of this joint to-day," Prime called back to him. "Take us to Pabst's in 'Hundred 'n Twenty-fif' Street."

As the cab started in obedience to this, I turned to the man beside me. "Take me home first, *please*," I begged.

He gripped my wrist and shook it, his eyes burning into mine. "I tell you, you're not going home."

I cringed away from him.

"What do you mean, dodging me like that?" he cried. "Damn you, I'll give you something to dodge for." Then he struck me in the face. . . .

There is no need to chronicle in detail all the occurrences of that afternoon and evening; the man was violent and silly and childish by turns, but I defended myself from all his varying moods. It was like a nightmare in which I seemed to myself to be trying to plow my way through a rough bit of country, beset by difficulties which were sometimes absurd, more often hideous, but from which I could not free myself. I was conscious, too, at intervals of the jolting of the cab; now and then the mud splashed up against the glass or I saw the street lights blinking through the rain.

In a street near the upper end of Central Park, Prime chanced to notice something familiar in the appearance of a summer garden we were passing; it may have been the Japanese lanterns swaying on the piazza, the music, or an awning flapping in the wet; at any rate his attention was diverted from the destination he had had in mind and he called out emphatically that this was the place for him. It was indeed a favorite haunt of his, a restaurant to which he had invited a party of us from

Mrs. Miggs's the week before. There was a young lad there whose singing advertised the place. Even now we heard his voice.

"Good music, good beer," commented Prime, as the cab came to a standstill. Then he alighted and held out his hand to me.

"I'll wait for you here," said I. He turned on his heel and I saw him go into the house. Then the cabby took it on himself to dismount from his perch and try to reason with me. "Why don't you go with him, miss?" he asked. "He's a good sort."

I gave the man one look and he said nothing more.

As I sat there awaiting Prime's return, the lights of the elevated station at One Hundred and Tenth Street beckoned invitingly. In a few minutes, if I so chose I could be safe at home. I was weary and heartsick, and the shelter of my own hall bedroom was the one thing I craved. But what would become of Prime if I deserted him?

I knew he had considerable money with him; in the restaurant I had seen the roll of bills from which he peeled off one of large denomination to pay the luncheon check, and I was enough his friend not to be willing to leave him in his present state at the mercy of whomsoever he might meet. Having fought him all the afternoon, I knew I need not fear him now; and I resolved to stay where I was till he returned; and then leave him safe at his own door as soon as that might be. But the lights in the elevated station seemed to be winking over my discomfiture.

When Prime reappeared, he was full of a new song he had heard and nothing would do but he must sing it to me then. Meantime I told the cabby to drive to Prime's address. But he noticed what I said and called out, "No, no," telling the cabby to drive somewhere else.

"Mr. Prime," said I, looking at him steadily, "we are going to Fifty —— Street."

His answer was a speechless stare; and I understood that the collapse of his will left me in control. I rose and poking the tip of my parasol through the trapdoor repeated the address and told the driver to make haste. Prime was maudlin now, a disgusting spectacle, begging my pardon for insulting me and then pleading for a kiss all in the same breath.

At last we reached the house where the young man lodged; having satisfied myself that the cabby did not overcharge his fare, I dismissed the hansom and helped Prime up the steps, praying that the watchful eye of Mrs. Miggs might not be turned on us.

I thought he would never, *never*, unfasten the inside door; the outer door he had opened without much delay, but inside the vestibule his fingers turned to thumbs. Once he dropped the latchkey and I searched for some time in the dark before regaining it. Then he snatched it from me, and whimpering like a child, fumbled for the keyhole; finally he found it, the door opened to admit him, he staggered inside—and my responsibility was at an end.

It was only an instant then till I scurried down the steps and traversed the short distance to Mrs. Miggs's. For a wonder I met no one. The outer door of our boarding house was not yet fastened for the night, so I had but one lock to turn and made quick work of that; then, breathless, ran upstairs to my hall room.

As I entered my own door, the room seemed to open almost human arms, enfolding me with the sense of quiet, shelter, peace. In the long nights when I had lain awake or cried myself to sleep, the stillness had been almost unendurable, but now it fell upon me like a benediction. Gratefully I locked the door—the door which shielded me from all intrusion—and sank down in a chair.

The plight of a woman married to a creature like him I had just left came home to me for the first time; here-

tofore I had thought only of the happy women and had envied them. But now I saw there was another side.

What I had that day experienced was too ghastly to relate in full, yet I realized that it was only a fragment of what some women had to bear. I could lock the door! For me, an episode like this need never be repeated. What if I were tied to such a man for life?

"I know something now of how a woman feels who has a drunken husband," I thought, shuddering. "At least I am spared that."

CHAPTER XXX

THE DRUNKARD'S WARNING

THE next day was Sunday. Prime did not appear at breakfast, but came in late for the midday dinner, slouching into his place; throughout the meal he never raised his eyes nor did he speak to any one save to reply in monosyllables when he was addressed. Once or twice before his manner had been much like this, but then I attached to it no significance. Now I thought I understood.

The sight of him brought vividly to mind yesterday's experience, and, wishing to banish all thought of it, I finished dinner as soon as possible and hurried to my room. By and by there was a knock on the door; answering it, I found the waitress and, to my surprise, she said, "Mr. Prime is in the parlor and wants to know if he can see you for a minute?"

I stood there undecided, wondering what to say.

"He looks sort—of sick," volunteered the girl.

"Tell him—" I began. "Tell him I'll be right down."

On the staircase I caught sight of him through a chink in the folding doors and noted the dejected tilt of his head as he paced up and down before the mantelpiece. He looked up as I entered and then swiftly looked away.

"I've come to apologize," he said, tossing his hat on the piano-stool. "And I want to tell you something."

His presence was unwelcome, but I reminded myself that having consented to see him I must hear what he

had to say; accordingly I sat down on the sofa and motioned him to a gilt chair at my left.

He pulled the chair up nearer and seated himself. "You were a brick yesterday," he said in a low tone.

"Oh, *please*," I cried, shrinking a little in spite of myself, "don't let's go into that."

"I'd give a lot if I could undo it," the man replied. "I've tried hard enough to keep on the water wagon the last two months, but—it's no use."

"Don't give up that way," I said, gently. "Everybody has something to contend with."

Savagely he turned on me. "What do you know about it?" he demanded. "I tell you, it's born in me and sure to come out when I least expect it. Why, I would no more have put you in a hole like that than——"

"Never mind," I interrupted him, "it's over now."

"Yes, it's over, all right," he agreed in a grim tone of voice. "I'm no kind of fellow for you to go around with, and I knew it from the start; but it was a new experience to associate with a girl like you, and I thought perhaps I could keep straight. But when a thing like that—craze for the booze, I mean—is in the blood, nothing on earth can keep a fellow from it. I remember my father when I was a kid—how mother used to try—and I've watched other men and I know what I'm talking about. I've taken pledge after pledge and cure after cure. They do some good, up to a certain point, and then,"—he threw out his hands with a despairing gesture—"there's the devil to pay. Don't you ever let anybody fool you with that pipe dream about 'reforming drunkards.' It's no go." He reached over to the piano-stool, picked up his hat, put it on his knee, twisted it around once or twice and said, abruptly, "I'm going down to Bay Ridge for the rest of the summer." Here he rose. "Will you shake hands for good-by?"

"Of course," I said, rising and putting out my hand. "And I wish you the best of luck."

"Shouldn't know what to do with it if I had it," he replied, despondently; and a moment later the door slammed behind him.

Theodore Prime I never saw again, and soon I was plunged into a period of perplexity that precluded even the thought of him.

CHAPTER XXXI

DEATH OF MRS. GREY—MY LIFE DOWNTOWN

IT had been a long hot summer, trying to every one. Mrs. Grey, the woman with whom I had been associated ever since coming to New York, she who always seemed to me the embodiment of health and energy, had been ailing for a week or so; but with her customary spirit, she made light of her discomfort and went on with her work. One evening I accompanied her home, as I often did when we had urgent matters to discuss, and, while we were in the midst of a long evening's work, she became so ill that I sent for her family physician. She had no children and her sister's family, who lived with her, were now out of town.

The doctor looked very grave, and I gathered that he feared appendicitis, though the symptoms were not yet localized. I remained with her all night, but, of course, a nurse was in attendance. In the morning Mrs. Grey was worse; symptoms of peritonitis had developed by that time and the family physician hastily called in a surgeon who diagnosed the trouble as a case of acute appendicitis, and said that in an immediate operation lay the only chance to save the patient's life. At ten o'clock they operated. That evening Mrs. Grey was dead.

When my parents died, I was too young to realize what it meant: now I felt that I had lost my only friend. Those first few days, of course, were so crowded with melancholy duties, that there was time to think only of what must then be done; but when everything was over and I went back to the boarding house, when I took up

again the daily round of routine, I knew the full measure of my loss.

In the office I was restless and depressed. For a long time indeed I had chafed against the monotony, the atmosphere of gloom, the constant contact with saddened and embittered lives: now there was nothing to relieve the somberness, and the future loomed up blacker still. Heretofore, I had had at least the consciousness that I was helping Mrs. Grey. But now she was gone. Under the circumstances of my life, with a temperament like mine—incapable of viewing any relation impersonally—her death was of profound significance; not only did it sunder my closest tie, but it left me with no courage, no inspiration for my work.

The self-supporting women, with whom that work brought me in touch, I pitied from the bottom of my heart; but I understood too well the real sorrows (as distinguished from the superficial struggles) of their lives to believe that I could furnish any real help. In other words, I could not single out any one woman and make a friend of her. The sight of all of them depressed me more and more. Like themselves I, too, was walking in the dark; and all the instincts of our nature—theirs and mine—cried out for light and love.

At this time, too, came developments which aggravated my general state of discontent. Heretofore I had had definite office hours, or when I did work overtime it was in a different atmosphere, in the uptown home of Mrs. Grey. I have said that there was never any disagreement between us two; but the hours when I was happiest with her were the evenings when, in her home she cast off her official character along with her business suit and we were friends first and fellow workers afterward. Then, too, the hours when I was free, I was far removed from the atmosphere of shop. But now all this was at an end.

After the death of Mrs. Grey, the society which then

superintended our activities was reorganized and the philanthropic work was mapped out on a larger scale. With more money at their disposal, the new officers introduced many changes in policy and management; there were many changes, too, in the office force. But viewing as an asset my years of training and experience, estimating at some worth the fact that I had been associated with Mrs. Grey from the very start, they made me a liberal offer to continue with the work; the only condition they imposed was that I must live in the downtown house which the society had recently acquired, and must exercise some jurisdiction over the limited number of young girls for whom it was the aim of the society to provide a temporary home on their arrival in New York.

This condition was irksome to me; but it was a *sine qua non* of the offer made by the society, and I accepted it. Under the circumstances, to decline an offer so liberal would have seemed the height of folly, though had another position in a more congenial field, even at less salary, presented itself at the same time, I should have hesitated not at all to make a change.

But with nothing else in prospect, I could not afford to lose my hold on a sure means of a livelihood. I had seen too many women out of work, had searched too long and arduously to find employment for the many well-equipped applicants who thronged our office—to say nothing of fruitless effort in behalf of the incompetent—to run the risk in my own case of like experience.

And so I stayed on where I was and tried to be grateful that I was not adrift. I remembered, too—but remembered only to reject—the customary rejoinder of Aunt Jane when in childhood I pleaded without avail for something that I craved.

"Think how much better off you are than many other folks," was her unvarying reply. Even then it was cold comfort, and as I grew older it seemed to have something

ignoble in it, to savor of the Pharisee. In the hall bedroom of a boarding house I had long ago believed I found the heart of solitude. Now I was in a hotbed of malice and distrust, owing to the gossip (which, it seems to me, is always pettier in a community made up exclusively of members of the same sex) and to the jealousy of some of my subordinates who, in years older than myself, resented having at their head a woman of my age.

Thus I walked carefully, ever on my guard. Part of a great machine, I still stood at a distance and watched the wheels go round. This does not mean that I failed in any duty—so far as it was given me to see what my duty was. I toiled unceasingly and was able at all times, I believe, to give a good account of my stewardship. Conscious of the dull ache of discontent, I still wore the garb of cheerfulness as if it had been fitted to me; and, in helping others, tried to forget myself.

But by the time my twenty-sixth birthday came round, after more than a year of residence in the institutional house maintained by the society, I admitted to myself that it daily grew more difficult to keep up the disguise. At heart I was like a prisoned creature beating against the bars; and under such circumstances, to realize my ideal of a well-poised woman, self-reliant and sustained, seemed utterly impossible.

The sight of young girls coming constantly to the city to make their way alone was so pitiful, that to myself the very depth of my sympathy seemed a bar to usefulness. "A counselor of young girls," I said, "should have more serenity."

According to the regulations, no newcomer could remain longer than a month in the house where I was in residence; and it was part of my duty to advise the strangers in the discouraging matter of obtaining work and to help them find a boarding place. I now have reason to believe that I did counsel them wisely, for with many of them I have since kept more or less in touch.

But at the time of which I write, I was in depths of despondency regarding my own efficiency.

Then, too, the misery I saw in the older women's faces depressed me more and more. In the round of routine, I observed hundreds of unmarried women suffering from poverty, overwork, ill health, and loneliness; women who, I believed then and am even more convinced to-day, would have been strong, efficient creatures, had they had half a chance for happiness, could they only have lived a normal life.

Many of them, to be sure, had developed eccentricities, they displayed unlovely oddities and irritating faults. But all this I looked upon as part of the tragedy. Nature is inexorable: when we break her laws, we must pay the penalty, and there is no mitigation of the penalty because of the offender's ignorance. Celibacy is unnatural: the celibate must atone. On the one hand are the primal needs of nature: on the other hand, conditions which prevent fulfillment of those needs. If the women to whom I am referring here had understood their own nature and the conditions of existence in New York—if I had understood—doubtless they and I would have remained in the country, where there would have been at least the average opportunities for normal, natural living that come to country girls.

Right here I wish to make it very plain that I do not represent the unmarried working woman in New York as a blatant, querulous creature dwelling on the injustice of her lot. If I did, she would be the first to accuse me of untruth. Ah, no, the vast majority are marvels of silence and bravery. It is only I who am trying here to give a faithful picture of conditions that I know exist.

The tacit uncomplaining misery I discerned in those about me, coupled with the culminative influences of my own lonely years, now bore bitter fruit. "And is this all there is?" I asked myself, "for me and for thousands of women like me in New York? Just to work and work

and work in order that, when one is too old to work, she may be able to pay for necessary care, may die in her own bed in some forlorn hotel or boarding house and be decently interred from her own savings, instead of being carried from the almshouse or old ladies' home to be buried by charity? Is there nothing in existence, then, but an agony of yearning? Nothing but the lifelong torture of hope baffled and denied? Is hunger planted in us only that we may be starved? Then why prolong the struggle? Why not have done with it at once?"

That such brooding was unwholesome and unsafe, I fully understood: in the newspapers from time to time I had read of suicides for which no reason was assigned, but to which I felt I held the clue; not only had I read of them, but I had known instances myself where, after fighting long against conditions she seemed powerless to change, some desolate woman had taken her own life; then there were other women who confessed to me that the burden of deprivation and loneliness was getting to be unendurable. "Some day I shall end it all," said one after another to me in confidence.

Then, of course, I did what was expected of me: I told them that such talk was worse than foolish—it was wrong, I said; and as earnestly as if the same temptation were not hanging over me, I tried to make them view life in more cheerful light. Indeed, it may have been just because the same temptation *was* hanging over me that my words rang true to them. In persuading others, I attempted to convince myself, but in my inmost soul the conviction took firm root that, for some temperaments, with no outlet for the need of loving that quivered ever in the heart, such end was inevitable.

I was familiar, too, with the hasty, ill-advised marriage which, failing any other, women often make; for after all, with some of us not happiness but completeness is the inmost craving. Many women would rather drink a poisoned draught than die of thirst. And time and

time again have I seen them rushing on a fate which to all eyes but theirs was evident from the first. And it may be that even they were less blinded than onlookers thought.

I remember one fine, handsome girl—music teacher in a boarding school, she was—who ran away with the only man she saw, the janitor of a nearby apartment house. There was a great deal of talk about it at the time and almost everybody called the girl a fool and predicted, truthfully enough, first separation, later a divorce.

Now, that girl—I chanced to know—was an orphan without a near relative on earth and, after the death of her father, a New England clergyman, she had come to New York to make her way alone. If she had had a home and average social opportunities; if she could have met men normally as girls can who live at home; if, even though she was a homeless orphan, through the nature of her employment she had been in the way of meeting men whose circumstances and upbringing were more like her own, there would have been little danger, I believe, of her marrying as she did. And my blood used to boil when I heard women, who had never had a wish ungratified, ridiculing her. Human nature is pretty much the same in all of us, and it is unsafe to boast of what we would or would not do in any given case: we never can predicate with certainty our conduct in emergencies which never have confronted us. Heredity, habit, training count for much. But sometimes they leave us in the lurch.

In conditions as I scanned them far and wide among women who were placed much as I was myself, there seemed for most of us little likelihood of sanity and poise where the primal relations were concerned; and watching the working-out of feminine psychology, I was afraid of the coming years. I could no longer live from day to day; more and more all through that autumn I felt that, in some way, I must change my environment. But I was at my wits' end what to do.

CHAPTER XXXII

DR. POST ADVISES CHANGE

THIS was the situation then when, one raw, bleak forenoon in November on the Elevated train, as I was returning from a call on a young girl who had recently left the settlement and had fallen ill in a Harlem boarding house, I met Dr. Post, who with his wife had boarded at Mrs. Miggs's.

After we had explained to each other the whyness of the whereness of an unaccustomed hour, and after I had inquired for Mrs. Post, the physician said, eying me critically meanwhile: "You're not looking well, Miss Baldwin. What's the matter?"

Ordinarily I should have laughed and said, "Nothing in the world." But to-day I was in that state of mind in which one clutches at a straw. Dr. Post had always been friendly; he might see some way now out of my predicament. We could talk in comfort at this time of day, for the rush hour crowds had gone. And so, after a moment of silence, I replied: "My work is a great strain upon the sympathies. I'm dealing with women—the poor, sick, and unfortunate—most of the time." And I told him of the young girl in Harlem on whom I had just called. "If I could only really help girls like her! If I could keep them from coming to New York. But," with a sigh, "it's a forlorn hope."

"What's the name of your concern?"

I told him.

"How long have you been with them?"

"Ever since I came to New York," said I. "Seven years this fall."

He nodded his head a little. "Young lady, you need a change."

"I know it," said I. "But I have to work, and I can't throw up a good job with nothing else in prospect. You see, Dr. Post, our society maintains as one of its side issues an employment bureau for governesses, nursery maids, and household workers of all sorts; and I know how difficult it is to place applicants even in those lines. As for myself—well, for a long time I've wanted to make a change. But I don't see any way."

Dr. Post looked thoughtful. "You're office manager down there, aren't you?"

"That's what it's called," said I. "But I have grown up in the work and can turn my hand to anything. I started in nominally as secretary to Mrs. Grey, who organized the society. And as time went on I made my own position."

"They pay you a good salary?"

I told him what it was.

He seemed surprised. "Well if you're worth all that to them you ought to be worth as much or more to somebody else."

"But I don't know 'somebody else,'" I retorted, smilingly.

"Say," exclaimed Dr. Post a moment later, "an idea just struck me. But," looking out of the window, "I have to get off next stop. Could you walk over toward Lexington Avenue with me? Then I could tell you this idea of mine and keep my appointment, too."

"Certainly," I replied; and we left the train together.

On the street Dr. Post continued: "There may be nothing in this, but at all events it won't do any harm to try. You've heard of the Vilmerding-Eems Company, of Denver, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes. In the office we've always used the output of their factory. It's a good thing."

"They're a high-class concern all right," he said. "I was born and brought up in Denver. Used to go to school with Vilmerding, who's now president of the company. He was older than I, and I looked up to him with a small chap's admiration for the big fellow who backs him in every scrap. Well, Vilmerding didn't have any money, but success was born in him. He got a job with this concern down near the foot and walked right along up till now he's president. I've just been out home to see my mother and on the train I ran into Vilmerding. I hadn't seen him for years, but he's just the same—best natured fellow in the world. He was telling me they're going to open a branch office here the first of the year and it struck me, just now in the Elevated, that there might be some chance for you. Vilmerding said he was having trouble in getting the right help. They could bring people on from Denver, but they don't want to cripple the force there. He just mentioned it, you know, by way of conversation, but there may be something in it. Anyway, I'll give you a card to Vilmerding and you can write to him. I should think," he mused, "you'd be just the person for office manager."

Thereupon Dr. Post took out a visiting card, wrote something on it and gave the card to me. I thanked him, he wished me good luck and we said good-by.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ASKING MR. VILMERDING FOR WORK

NO longer purposeless, I resumed the journey downtown, glancing frequently at the card Dr. Post had given me. In the evening I wrote to Mr. Vilmerding, enclosing the card of introduction. I used office stationery, but, thinking I could state my own case better in a personal interview than by letter, I gave little information about myself, simply asking for an appointment when he was next in town.

In due time came a reply from Mr. Vilmerding, saying he expected to be in New York within ten days, and that he would be glad to see me then. A week later came a telegram from the Vilmerding-Eems Company informing me that Mr. Vilmerding would see me at the Waldorf-Astoria on Monday afternoon at four o'clock.

It was already Monday afternoon when the telegram arrived; indeed, it was only an hour before the time set for me to call at the hotel uptown. However, by dint of much hurrying I managed to present myself before one of the Waldorf-Astoria's gilded clerks at four o'clock; and I asked for "Mr. Vilmerding."

Of course, I should have sent up my card with the name of the man whom I wished to see written on it: but in my haste I had forgotten my cardcase, so I blushingly stammered out the name. The clerk scribbled something on a card and summoned a page. As for me, I kept on blushing, for when it came to the point, when the vision that had sustained me for the last two weeks

was really to materialize, I found myself decidedly embarrassed.

My only experience in seeking employment in New York had been with Mrs. Grey, to whom I had been sent by another woman, Mrs. Yorke. This was very different. My years of association with women exclusively also tended to exaggerate the strangeness of this call; to be sure, I tried to fortify myself by the remembrance that I was looking for work and that a working woman must pocket her sensibilities along with foolish pride; but all the same, I spent a bad quarter of an hour in one of the reception-rooms of that huge New York hotel which is a sort of clearing house for many varied interests.

Soon it was more than a quarter of an hour, and no one from the throngs of people, who were passing and repassing the corner where I sat, had stopped to speak to me; now and then a name was paged, but it was never the name that I listened for. I straightened my hat, fidgeted with my veil, and wished that I were anywhere else on earth. Enviously I eyed the crowds, particularly those young women who, I felt sure, had not come to see a man; and I started nervously when any one approached.

By and by a page appeared. "Eleventh floor. Mr. Vilmerding will meet you at the elevator," said he.

As I emerged from the elevator at the eleventh floor, I saw no one but the chambermaid, who hurried down the corridor. After waiting a moment or two, I heard voices in a reception-room nearby and timidly went in, glancing to see if either of the two men who were there was expecting me. Evidently not. They were deep in conversation over architects' designs.

"Well, I'm on the eleventh floor, anyway," I thought, as I settled down on a divan and looked around the room.

There was nobody in sight save the two who were comparing notes and quoting architect. Presently they

left and, in lieu of better occupation, I fell to studying the pattern of the carpet.

The pattern was intricate and I grew so absorbed in trying to find out where one figure ended and the next began, that I never heard him come into the room. The first I knew was that a laughing, genial voice was saying:

"This is Miss Baldwin, I know," and I looked up to meet the quizzical eyes of Mr. Vilmerding.

In manner, in appearance, Mr. Vilmerding was everything I liked; he radiated success and vigorous masculinity. In stature he was of more than medium height, with a fine ruddy complexion, and his clothes looked as if they were made by a tailor who knew how. [In repose, the shaven lips were pressed together, molding the face into lines of will, the look of mastery. But he was smiling now and I observed that this man—he was a little over forty and already had an international reputation —seemed as care free as a child.

When I told him of my difficulty in finding him, he threw back his head and laughed for all the world like a big boy.

"Well," he said, "it's too bad. Next time I'll call on you."

"Yes. I—I—never went to see a man before."

And then as I suddenly remembered that my only reason for coming to see him was to ask for work, all my embarrassment returned. We had been chatting of Dr. Post, and Mr. Vilmerding told me of their school days together and talked entertainingly of many things.

Everything he said interested me, but a social chat was not the reason of my being there. By and by when I could get an opening, very brisk and businesslike I said:

"It was in reference to a position in your New York office, Mr. Vilmerding, that I wrote you. Dr. Post was good enough to think there might be some place for me there."

At this his manner changed. He had been so cordial in our talk before, as to raise my hopes concerning the outcome of the interview. But now he sat silent, watching me; and I was conscious of some clash—something almost like hostility, which it seemed to me I must overcome. "Probably he thinks women silly and inefficient in business," flashed across my mind. And with redoubled earnestness I endeavored to convince him of my qualifications for a position of responsibility. But I made little headway. He appeared to listen to what I said, though I felt his mind was elsewhere. There was something, too, in his gaze that disconcerted me. Instead of lessening as time went on, my embarrassment, as I attempted to talk business with Mr. Vilmerding, increased. And there were many interruptions on his part; indeed, he switched the conversation away from business every chance he had. What did I think of So-and-So in his new rôle? Had I seen such and such a play? Was I fond of bridge?

I had not come to this hotel to-day to talk about the theater or cards. I had come here in the hope of finding work. But it so happened that I was fond of the theater; and as Mr. Vilmerding evidently wished to talk of it, it seemed to me the part of wisdom for the time being to respect his preference. Perhaps he would then show more interest in what I had at heart.

Accordingly I answered his questions with all the natural enthusiasm which I should have shown in conversation on such subjects with any one; and with an added zest which I now know was due to the presence of Mr. Vilmerding himself. For I liked him very much.

"Why isn't he like that when I try to talk business?" I mused, encouraged by his smile at my comments on the theater. And I tried again. But Mr. Vilmerding only relapsed into silence, eying me steadily the while, as, in my eagerness, flushed and tremulous, I pleaded my own cause.

Finally he said: "I don't know whether to make a place for you in the business or adopt you."

"Oh, you can't adopt me," I replied; and we both laughed. I, because it seemed courteous—and politic, perhaps—to recognize his joke. But all the same I was determined not to be side-tracked. This was not an afternoon tea: it was an effort on my part to get a job. And so, after a pause, I said: "Then you can make a place for me?"

"Yes, I *can*," he repeated, thoughtfully, "but I don't want to. I don't want you in my office. I think you'd be a bully playmate. And from now on I shall be in New York every month or six weeks at the outside."

I rose. "Before you come again, won't you please make up your mind to find some place for me in your company? To tell the truth, Mr. Vilmerding," I confessed, candidly, "I'm badly rattled. I never applied to a man for work before. But you can find out all about me from" (I mentioned the name of the organization with which I was connected). "Good-by." Here I put out my hand, and he held it while I said: "Won't you please think hard?"

"Bless you, yes," said Mr. Vilmerding. "But I don't see why you run away so soon."

"Oh, I'm a business woman," I replied, glad of an opportunity to emphasize the fact, "and I have lots of work yet to do to-day. Good-by."

He accompanied me to the elevator and was so altogether charming that I was convinced—not only by his manner, but by the statement that he could make a place for me—that a change for the better in my affairs was imminent.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AN UNEXPECTED TRIP

IN a tumult of emotion I went home, making my way through the familiar streets as if it were a new experience. Everything looked different. At all times, to be sure, the excitement of human contact stimulated me; if I simply walked up Fifth Avenue alone with no one to speak to and no face I knew in sight, there was exhilaration in the exercise. But to-day I walked on air.

After that I waited, going on with my daily work as usual, save for the undercurrent of excitement that ran through it all. I felt that I was on the verge of making an important change, and I wanted to leave things in good order where I was, with no loose ends for my successor to pick up; and so I labored with more than customary energy.

But by and by, when every last thing had been done, the waiting grew a little tedious. The interview with Mr. Vilmerding came to seem more and more a fleeting vision, less and less an incident destined to have great results. And when Thanksgiving Day had come and gone with no further word from Mr. Vilmerding, I began to have some fears; if I were going into a new office at New Year's, I wanted to know something definite about it now. The time was short enough at best, and I owed it to the officers of the society to notify them of my plan to leave. While I was not so foolish as to fancy I could not be replaced, I knew it was not always easy to find at

once the right person for a position of responsibility; and so for many reasons I chafed at the delay.

Several times I was on the point of speaking to the president of the society, whom I saw at frequent intervals; especially on one occasion when she went out of her way to praise me for a matter involving some diplomacy which she thought I had brought to a successful end. It didn't seem quite honorable to accept—with its implication for the future—her assurance of the society's appreciation of my usefulness without telling her that my resignation might be looked for any day. But the sense of fitness held me back. Not till Mr. Vilmerding spoke the word, not till he told me what place he had decided to make for me in the company, not till there was some definite business arrangement, could I speak to any one.

And then out of a clear sky came an unexpected shaft. I have said that, so far as possible, I held aloof from all bodies of women agitating for the suffrage. But Mrs. Grey, an ardent suffragist, had been prominent in many clubs; the avowed object of some of them was to secure the franchise, though there were many differences of opinion among the clubs as to the best means to that end; other societies, in which she maintained membership, were literary, educational, or purely philanthropical. With the aims of all of them, Mrs. Grey sympathized. Everywhere she was held in high esteem and the influence of her presence at conventions was considered of great weight.

It so happened that, in June of the year she died, she had promised to read a paper before a meeting that was scheduled for December of the following year. I remembered hearing her speak of it at the time. But in the shock of her sudden death and the confusion of subsequent events, the matter passed entirely from my mind; even when she mentioned the engagement, I do not think I asked where the convention was to be. Mrs. Grey traveled a great deal, and I was always much more inter-

ested in the gown she was to wear than in her manuscript; and on this occasion I had little curiosity concerning a convention that was slated for so far ahead.

Indeed, I never thought of it again till, early in December of the present year, I received from the programme committee a very polite communication requesting me to attend the convention and tell them of "our beloved Mrs. Grey." Of her work, they said, they knew: it would always be honored by those striving for the welfare of the sex. What they wanted now from me, who had been close to her, was some appreciation more personal.

This request it was impossible to refuse. All my loyalty to the memory of Mrs. Grey forbade it; furthermore, the president of the society, with whom the committee had communicated, sent me a special delivery letter, saying she felt sure I looked upon the matter as she did—in the light of a duty as well as a privilege.

All this moved me very much: but I have not yet revealed what moved me most of all. The convention city was the home of Mr. Vilmerding.

At this juncture, I tried—oh, so hard—to banish all thought of him. I wanted to think only of my friend, the woman who was gone; to live in the spirit of that noble nature that I might present her as she was. But throughout preparation of the paper which I was to read, for I could not trust myself to speak *ex tempore*, ran the consciousness that I was going to the city where he lived.

I reminded myself that he wouldn't know that I was there; his field was far removed from the activities of women's clubs. But at any rate, I should see places that were well known to him, should probably meet people he knew well. There was even the possibility of my meeting himself by accident. In that case, what was I to do?

And then I walked over to the photograph of Mrs.

Grey that stood upon my desk. Looking straight into her eyes, as I had been wont to do in life, I said, with all the gravity of a promise made unto the dead: "Dear, I will not be so weak as to think of him till the convention is over with. I am going there for *you.*"

Someway it seemed easier after that. I was surprised at my own calmness as I traveled West; surprised and not a little pleased with my reception at the journey's end. It was far West and everything was new to me. The convention lasted two days; whether, in my little talk in the afternoon session of the closing day, I acquitted myself better or worse because consciousness of the nearness of Mr. Vilmerding mingled with my reverent memory of Mrs. Grey, I have no way of knowing. But every one was very kind.

CHAPTER XXXV

MR. VILMERDING MISUNDERSTANDS

WHEN the convention adjourned, two of the Eastern delegates whom I had seen at the hotel asked me when I was returning to New York, with the idea, I inferred, of fitting their plans to mine that we might travel in company. At first I pretended not to hear. But they were persistent, and I finally made some indefinite reply to the effect that I did not know. I had never been so far West before, I said, and now that I was here I wanted to see something of the place before I left.

This was very true, but it was also true that the presence of those two women—they chanced to be the dominant, aggressive type—irritated me. Only against my will would I have traveled with them anywhere. But here and now I wanted most of all to be alone and think. However, there was some additional delay, owing to the kind wish of several ladies to show me various courtesies as the friend of Mrs. Grey. Not till the last good-by was said and the delegates were safely out of town, could I revel in the luxury of letting myself remember where I was.

From the window of my room in the hotel, I looked out at roofs and chimneys and long blocks of office buildings, and wondered which one of them was his. He might be distant several miles—it was a large city—or he might be only a few blocks away. Then, as I glanced around the room, my eye fell on the directory hanging on a hook underneath the telephone. It took only a moment's search to find the address of the Vilmerding-Eems

Company; then I looked up the residence of Mr. Vilmerding. But names of streets meant nothing to me, and this brought him no nearer than before.

As my gaze still lingered at his page in the telephone directory, the thought occurred to me to call him up. His telephone number danced before me on the page as if daring to make use of it. . . . I passed my hand over my eyes in a bewildered way: then I rose slowly—but sat down again slowly, too. Something—something derived from a stern New England ancestor—seemed tugging to hold me back.

"No," I said at last. "I've done all that I can do. Anything more depends on him."

I walked back to the window and stood there looking out; then, all of a sudden there was a ring at my telephone. I sprang to answer it, feeling sure that it was Mr. Vilmerding. I had been thinking so earnestly of him, that in some mysterious way he knew of my presence in the city; perhaps he had seen my name on the hotel register. But there was no time to hunt for explanations now.

Hurriedly I took down the receiver. "Yes?" I cried.

There was no response.

"Hello," I said; and heard my voice tremble on the word.

Still there was no response.

I stood on tiptoe, for the telephone was a little too high up for me, and jingled the receiver hook up and down to call the attention of the operator.

"Oh, 'scuse me," she vouchsafed at last. "I didn't mean to ring your bell." Then I realized my own absurdity and hung up the receiver in disgust.

The temptation to communicate with Mr. Vilmerding again swept over me; afraid to trust myself to resist it if I remained in the city long, I began with feverish haste to look up New York trains. Then I bought my ticket, paid my hotel bill, and at the railway station checked my

hand luggage that I might be free until train time; when all this was done I still had several hours on my hands.

First I thought that I would take a street-car that passed the home of Mr. Vilmerding, so that I could see with my own eyes just where he lived; through Dr. Post I knew he was a widower with a small daughter and two sons. But inquiry soon brought out the fact that there was no street-car line on that residential avenue; and without knowing whither I was bound, I boarded the first car that came along, with the intention of going to the end of the route and then coming back to this starting point.

The car ran out into the country a long way and after a few miles I admitted to myself that it was tedious, and the day was bitterly cold. But when we returned to town, my interest revived; I scanned the name of every street in the business section we traversed, hoping that some time we should turn into the street which was impressed upon my mind as the home of the Vilmerding-Eems Company.

But the hope was vain. The car was not well heated, and I was hungry, too. Accordingly when I perceived that we were in the vicinity of the hotel where I had spent the last two days, I decided to stop in there and get something to eat. As we reached the hotel I signaled the conductor, then left the car and entered the hotel restaurant. I was restless and wished it were train time. But it was only three o'clock.

After luncheon, I felt better and made up my mind to walk to the railway station—the first time I had ridden there—and kill time as best I could by watching the people in the waiting-room. I set out presently, intending to follow the street-car tracks. But there were many tracks and I became confused; I haven't much sense of locality, anyway, and in a strange city always lose my way.

Soon I found myself on a street I had never seen before and, as I looked up at a street corner to find out the name, my attention was attracted to a large, fine building just across the way. There was one huge sign in front, gilt lettering on a black background, "The Vilmerding-Eems Company," it said.

For a moment I stood and stared at it; then quickly crossed the street, my head held high. I had made up my mind.

On the ground floor of the building, a salesman directed me to the elevator. "Mr. Vilmerding is on the second floor," he said.

The elevator was very slow; so was the boy—he was red-headed and they called him "Harold"—who took my card in to the private office. But finally he drifted out again and casually remarked, "Mr. Vilmerding 'll see you pretty soon."

At length a blonde young woman with a pompadour appeared. "Will you kindly step this way?" said she, and ushered me down a long passage to an enclosure that was shut off from the rest by stained partitions and by windows of ground-glass. An instant later the door opened noiselessly, Miss Blonde Pompadour disappeared, and I stood there alone.

Already he was coming forward, both hands outstretched in greeting. "Hello, hello," he said, taking my right hand in both of his.

A sudden, happy sense that all was well now stole over me; my seriousness vanished instantly and, knowing he was glad to see me, I felt perfectly at home. But I said nothing at the start. I simply withdrew the hand which he had still retained, folded my arms, and smiled at him.

"What the devil are you doing out here?" he laughingly demanded, as he brought a chair for me.

"Oh," said I, a little airily no doubt, as I seated myself and smoothed out a wrinkle in my sleeve, "I thought

I'd better find out how that thinking operation was getting on."

At this a more serious expression crossed his face. "Why, I told you I'd think hard."

"So you did. But I've heard nothing definite since then, and it's getting pretty near New Year's."

Just then a young woman entered, laid a pile of correspondence on the desk and went out again. Meantime I was examining the room. "What a stunning office!" I exclaimed.

Mr. Vilmerding bowed. "Glad it meets the approval of New York."

"But after all," I reminded him, "it's your New York office I'm most interested in."

He walked over to his desk and then faced round to me. "Come over here and talk to me while I sign my mail," he said, drawing up a chair for me alongside his desk.

I complied, eying with amazement the mass of correspondence awaiting his signature. "Gracious, do you write that many letters every day?"

He picked up a pen and critically surveyed the point. "This is a very small bunch," he said, as he began with the first letter on the pile. "Go right on talking. I can listen just as well. I've written my name so many times I can do it with my eyes shut now."

"Let's see you," I dared him. "I'm sure you'll write uphill."

He squared himself in his chair. "You don't expect me to shut my eyes when *you're* here, do you?"

"Why not? Afraid I'll make off with the valuables? I couldn't, with Harold on the job. A red-headed boy like that must be a great protection to a man like you."

He chuckled, and for a minute there was no sound save the scratching of his pen. I was watching the sheets of paper fly. As he stopped to blot his signature,

I said: "Think how much time you'd save if you had a shorter name."

Ruefully he shook his head. "Too late to think of that. And being a man there's no chance of my ever changing it."

"You poor fellow," said I.

"Say," said he, "did you really come out here to see me?"

"Of course not," I retorted with a blush. "Do you require a diagram with every joke. However," I continued, for I felt a little guilty on that score, "I was just going to explain awhile back when that girl came in and then—why, I've had to see that you crossed your t's and dotted all your i's. No," I announced with an impressive air, "you are incidental. My presence in your city," and I waved my hand, "is due to the convention of ——" (here I named the organization that had invited me).

"Holy smoke," said he. "Do you travel with that bunch?"

"Not much," said I, remembering the overtures I had ignored. "Two of the delegates wanted me to go back home with them, but I declined. They went this morning and I start to-night." Then I explained what it was that called me there.

"And I've told myself a dozen times to-day that I wouldn't step inside your place," I confessed to him. "And then having vowed I wouldn't, why, of course," a little apologetically, "here I am. But it's an exception to the rule."

"And your getting in is an exception, too," was the reply. "To *my* rule."

I laughed. "All on account of poor old Eve, I suppose? Well, since I did get in and am likely to be driven out of here any minute by Harold of the flaming sword——"

But he interrupted me. "I said you were an exception. You know I like to have you here."

"As a caller, yes. But I want a position in the New York office."

At this he laid down his pen. "That would never do," he said. "I've been thinking about it and about you since I saw you in New York. The manager of our office there is to be a man who has grown up in the business. He knows all about it. But even if you knew ten times as much—I don't want you there."

"Well, then, why not here?" I pleaded. "I'm not particular about locality, so long as I can change my work. And you said you could make a place for me."

"But you know what else I told you, too."

Wide-eyed I looked at him. "No, I don't. Not anything important."

"About the playmate," he reminded me.

"Oh, *that*," I cried. "I never gave it a second thought. That was only a pleasantry."

My hands were toying nervously with the pen he had laid down; suddenly I felt his fingers tighten around mine. "No, it wasn't," he said in a low tone.

But instantly the door opened and the same young woman who had entered once before reappeared with another batch of mail, and then went out again.

"H'm! That poor girl was awfully embarrassed," commented Mr. Vilmerding, as she closed the door behind her. "No wonder! We both jumped. Now that's one reason I don't want you here. I can't afford anything of that sort in my office. I think more of my business than I would of any woman in the world. If you were here, all I could do would be to install you in a flat and go to see you when I could."

The unexpectedness of these words and the sudden comprehension of what they implied gave me the sense of dizziness that follows on a physical blow. My lips parted on a gasp, but I could not speak. I sat there quivering.

He turned to look at me; the expression of my averted

face, my whole attitude, must have struck him, for, putting out his hand, he said, kindly: "Why, what is it, dear?"

At the word, the tone, the evidence of his genuine surprise, I only winced the more. My very innocence made me quick to feel myself rebuked. But he was still looking at me, and I staggered to my feet. "Oh, what did I do—or say—" I moaned, "to make you think anything like that?" and my voice trailed away into a shamed silence.

"Why," he hesitated, and the color mounted slowly to his face, "I supposed we understood each other. But," pulling out his watch, "we can't talk here. That door is liable to open any minute. Now, you go over to the ——" (mentioning the hotel where I had spent the last two days) "and I'll join you presently. You and I have got to have a good long talk."

"No," said I, trying to steady my voice, "I have only one thing to say to you, and I can say it here whether that door opens or not. Someway—I don't know how—it seems I have given you the wrong impression. It has taught me a lesson. Good-by."

And before he had time to speak, I was out of the office and with flaming cheeks was hurrying down the long passage toward the elevator; yet once among the employees, of whom there were many on the second floor, I reminded myself that there must be nothing in the manner of my leaving to excite remark. I even halted for a moment to inspect some tapestry.

Downstairs my progress was retarded by the crowd. The season of Christmas shopping was now well advanced, and in this late afternoon the store was thronged with salespeople and purchasers. The place was gay with decorations suitable for the holidays; the Christmas spirit filled the air—but in my heart was shame. I couldn't drive away the thought that I had brought this on myself. For whatever had happened to me of this sort

before I was not responsible: *this* I had gone out of my way to find.

I went directly to the railway station and in the bustle and confusion there sought to still the inner tumult; but without avail. In the babel of sounds I heard distinctly but one voice; no matter where I turned, I was confronted by one face that wore the genuine expression of surprise. But did the entire responsibility rest with me for this man's mistake? Just because a girl, who most of the time had lived under conditions that were repugnant to her, found herself for once in an atmosphere she liked and showed the high spirits that were natural—did that justify a man for thinking the unthinkable? Was innocence then in danger of being everywhere misinterpreted?

Throughout the journey to New York this questioning kept up, but more persistent still was the consciousness that I was not wholly free from blame. The realization dawned on me that where the affections were concerned I could not trust my judgment. I liked Mr. Vilmerding from the moment I set eyes on him; and the liking had blinded me to the possible construction he might place on my motive in applying to him for work. That the motive was honorable, I knew; but it was not when talking business that I felt most at home with him: it was when we were talking about ourselves. Something had told me not to go to his office. I went in defiance of the warning: I deserved my punishment.

This was the conclusion that I reached at the journey's end; but with it came resolve to put it all behind me, to forget forever what had passed in Denver, and to begin anew at my old task. Gratitude welled up in me that I had work to do in a field where no one questioned my honesty, no one insulted me. If there were disadvantages in working entirely among those of my own sex, there were mitigations, too.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE ULTIMATUM

THE morning after my return, the president of the society came down to the settlement. To my surprise she kissed me. "Now tell me all about it," she enjoined, as she drew up a chair opposite my own.

"All—about—it?" I faltered, remembering Mr. Vilmerding.

The president laughed. "Oh, you're so modest, I don't suppose you want to talk. I had a note from Mrs. Haynes" (a Philadelphia delegate), "and we're very proud of you. But I'd like your own idea of the convention."

"Oh," said I. It seemed to me that the convention had been years and years before.

However, in the next few days I regained the sense of values and adjusted myself to the treadmill of routine. I was thinking how to make the best of things; soon I evolved a plan which, I thought, promised increased efficiency for me and as well some relief from present monotony, *if* I could only persuade the officers of the society to agree to it. I knew myself well enough by this time to understand that there must be some change if I was to continue indefinitely to do good work. Accordingly I decided to stake all on one throw.

One afternoon when the president was at the house helping me trim a Christmas tree for a club of working girls, I asked her if she would appoint some time soon for an interview when I could set before her my decision

concerning future work? Her alarmed look, as she acquiesced, was not lost on me.

The time she named was that very evening, and I went to her well prepared. I had thought long and earnestly, I said, and was convinced that I could not continue to get best results from the machine which was myself without some variation from the arrangement made over a year ago; then the society insisted on my living in the house. But now, after being constantly on call, with no relaxation from the strain of heavy responsibilities, with no opportunity for contact with the outside world, with nothing to offset the somberness, I had decided that some change was imperative. Either the officers of the society must relieve me of the burden of residence or I must resign.

All this I said very slowly, very calmly to the president. It was true—and I meant every word of it. But I shivered inwardly. I had absolutely nothing else in view and, if the society rejected the condition I imposed, I knew not where to look for a position; the memory of my recent experience with Mr. Vilmerding seared me like a flame. But I could not afford to let my fears be seen. The president's own expression of alarm, when I asked her for the interview, encouraged me somewhat: and so I went on speaking with what confidence I could.

When I finished she stretched out both hands and, to my profound relief, exclaimed: "One thing is certain, Miss Baldwin. We can't let you go. Some arrangement must be made."

And an arrangement was made within the next few weeks whereby I was to have in future regular office hours at the settlement. From nine o'clock till five for six days of the week I was to be on duty as before. But another woman was engaged for resident work the remainder of the time; and I was free to live anywhere I chose.

Mrs. Miggs had now gone out of business, or I should

doubtless have returned to her. The house she lived in had been sold, and with the one next door was soon to be torn down to make way for the new home of a club.

But New York is full of boarding houses and I soon found one in West Seventy —— Street that bid fair to be as satisfactory as such makeshift existence ever is. By this time I thought I was inured to loneliness and toil. All I asked, so it then seemed to me, was a place that I could call my own, to which I could repair when the day's work was over with—a place to which the atmosphere of shop could not penetrate.

CHAPTER XXXVII

MRS. TATE CO-OPERATES

THE boarding house in West Seventy —— Street was a long distance from my work, but, after residence in the slums, I wished to be as far away as possible; and the Elevated was convenient. Responsibility for the welfare of young girls, the sorrow of seeing them fail to get what they wanted—as I had failed, myself—had grown to be so terrible, that now, in the quick rebound of my release from the life of the settlement, I was once more like a child let out of school. As I look back on it I wonder at my long-continued buoyancy.

Instead of a hall bedroom, I engaged this time the large back room on the third floor of the house; the house had an extension, and the windows of my room looked out into the back yards of private residences on the street below. They were attractive yards even now in winter, and I anticipated the time in spring when the owners would begin to cultivate the little plots of ground; for Mrs. Tate, the landlady, when she rented the room to me, had enlarged upon "the view," and told me what I might later on expect in the way of "a restful bit of green."

Then, too, Central Park was near and I promised myself frequent tramps in the city's chief pleasure-ground. Even if I must walk alone, what mattered it? The Park was glorious, and I wasn't going to spoil the blessings that I had by fretting about those I lacked.

The room itself had pleasing possibilities, and I se-

cured it at a low rate because the season was so far advanced. I could not have paid the customary price, but now Mrs. Tate preferred to "let it go at a sacrifice," she said, rather than have it longer on her hands; then, too, she was doubtless influenced by the fact that I expected to remain in town all summer. And she also told me—this I mention because it shows a unique professional view-point I never met elsewhere—that she "thought it would be an advantage to her to have such a highly educated young lady in the house!"

At all events the room was mine for a price that I could pay and, after having been cooped up so long, first in hall bedrooms and then downtown in small quarters where I was at everybody's beck and call any time of day or night, I revelled in the space at my disposal now. The day I moved in I was chuckling to myself as I unpacked my trunks, when Mrs. Tate came in to consult me about the placing of the furniture.

"Oh, it's fine," I shouted, with a wide sweep of the arms, "to have room enough to swing a cat. Not that I want to," I added hastily. "I hate cats—almost as much as mice."

"Well, you won't find neither of 'em in my house," Mrs. Tate declared. "Nor dogs. I ha'in't no use for 'em. Now, Miss Baldwin, if you want," she volunteered, standing with arms akimbo by the door, "I'll take out that bed for you, though, if I do say it as shouldn't, you never slept on a better pair of springs. An' I'll get you in a couch, an' you can put the bureau over in the alcove with a screen in front an' then rig up a cozy corner. I've got a lot of stuff I'll let you hev for a cozy corner—heathen idols an' arrows an' fans down in the cellar that some folks left here once—an' you can hev your room sort of parlorlike, an' entertain your friends. You see, I've ben a girl myself an' I know a public parlor discourages young men."

"Cozy corner? Yes," I cried. "I want every arrow

in the place, every gimcrack that the cellar holds! I haven't any friends—men friends, at least—but I've lived so long in a soap-box of a room that now—!" Here words failed me and I gazed blissfully around and then up at the wall. "Couldn't kick that ceiling, could I, Mrs. Tate? I had one that I almost could."

Mrs. Tate was big and lame and motherly, and at first sight I was drawn to her; she in turn would do anything she could to make me comfortable. She was a good housekeeper and a stanch friend; the only thing I had against her was that she would persist in referring to me as "a highly educated young lady." But I could never make her change it, and to-day, if I should meet her, I feel sure she would ask me how to pronounce words that were strange to her and would apologize for her "bad grammar," just as she did of old.

To supplement the articles of furniture supplied by Mrs. Tate, or to replace those I did not like, I bought a table, a desk, and a couple of easy chairs. This entailed prowling around in second-hand shops and attending auction sales and, both money and leisure being limited with me, it took a long time to find just what I desired; however, the search, giving me a sense of importance as a domestic woman occupied with the affairs of her household, filled pleasurably many hours. At last the task was finished, and the result, I acknowledged to myself, was satisfactory.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"THE HOUSE OF GOD"

BUT when the excitement of furnishing the room subsided, when the newness had worn off, my buoyancy began to flag. "What's the use?" I asked myself. "There's no one to enjoy it with me. If Alison were here, everything would be different." Now for the first time in my life I had a suitable place for her —and she was no nearer than before. To the separation from my sister I had never been resigned, but still I could not feel that I had any right to reveal myself to her. No matter how often or in how many different moods I faced the situation, it always looked the same. How joyously, I thought, would I work to keep a home for her if I only might! How I would shield her from the world! If there were anybody that belonged to me, the whole aspect of existence would be changed. But just for myself alone, what mattered anything?

I looked around the pleasant room and smiled a little bitterly to think I had imagined that by altering the environment, by increasing the surface apparatus of my life, by getting together a multiplicity of *things*, I could banish the inner solitude. The abundance I beheld now represented deeper impoverishment. Instead of having contentedness and gratitude enough to spread out over this larger area, I felt there was only so much more room to be lonely in.

At different times I invited parties of working girls from the settlements to spend an evening with me. They accepted, I provided entertainment and refresh-

ments, and we all went through the motions of gayety. But they knew and I knew, though we all ignored it, that we already had a superfluity of feminine society; what those girls needed was the normal companionship of young men. This need of theirs I had no way to remedy.

So far as I was myself concerned at this period, bowed beneath the sense of shame resulting from Mr. Vilmerding's misunderstanding of me, it seemed that I could never look any man in the face again. The emptiness of life appalled me: and yet one must go on living. Despair, which some one has defined as "the eagerness of unfed hope," laid hold of me.

But I did not yield. I resolved to plow my way somehow through the slough of despond. First of all, I tried going to church—and now I must go back a little to explain why I had not tried this before.

In childhood I was accustomed to regular attendance at the Congregationalist church, and at twelve years of age I knew so much of the New Testament "by heart"—as the saying is, though in my case it was more a matter of the head—that Aunt Jane's spiritual adviser believed I was "called to minister to those who sit in darkness." All through college, too, I had been a devoted church-goer, and had taught in Sunday school. Though still in my teens, I had, as country girls usually have, a definite place in the religious life of the small community.

In New York it was different. In common with hosts of strangers, I experienced the feeling of impermanence, of being an atom blown hither and yon by shifting gusts over which I had no power, for which I had no responsibility; on the other hand, I know that many young people do bring to the city with them letters from the church officers at home, and soon transfer their membership to some New York society. It seems to me this is a wise thing to do. But I didn't do it.

Of course, in nearly eight years of residence—up to the time of which I am writing now—I did go to church

at intervals; but always as a stranger and always was I chilled by the atmosphere. This I mention in no spirit of complaint; if I had sought out the pastor of any of those churches, or one of his assistants, I should doubtless have found cordiality. But I didn't seek out any one; I didn't even go half way, and no one came to meet me. In fact, I seldom went to the same church twice. When I came to New York—at nineteen, just out of college—I made up my mind to hear in turn all the famous New York preachers that I might compare them with Mr. Zeller, of Manchester.

Mr. Zeller was a keen thinker, a wonderful preacher, and a most unusual man. Because of his liberal religious views, his pastorate of a conservative society in a large New England city had come to an end; this was not long before I entered the university and within two years he was called as pastor to a small society in Manchester that was an offshoot of one of the old churches there. The more conservative church members in other denominations had long regarded the religious views upheld by this small society as "decidedly advanced," and had sympathized with the attitude of the mother church toward the rebellious children who had left her fold. But soon after Mr. Zeller's pastorate began, there was a decided change in the attitude of the community. The new preacher's audience was the largest in the town. Members of other communions flocked to his chapel for the evening service, while a large contingent of the college faculty and students—as well as many of the townspeople—heard him gladly at all times. To eke out the small salary the society could afford to pay, the university trustees engaged Mr. Zeller to lecture on economics. The arrangement worked out well; and for years Mr. Zeller, refusing most flattering offers elsewhere, remained in Manchester, and his influence was potent on the thinking of the college town.

But in my own case—I was very young and imma-

ture—this influence had at first an unfortunate effect, simply because of my inability to comprehend the spirit of his teaching. I was critical of everything that differed from his theology; more than that, with the passion of personal loyalty which I then carried to extremes, I was almost hostile to any pulpit presence but his own.

Later on, the sermons that I occasionally listened to in New York City did not hold my interest; it seemed a waste of time and energy to go to church to hear some man preach who did not command my intelligence, when, by staying at home, I could read something helpful from the work of a master mind. The frigidity of metropolitan churches repelled me; then, too, there was a period when I could not afford a sitting, nor could I contribute much (if anything) to the collection.

All these excuses I went over many times, trying to justify myself for departing from the habit of my youth. My church attendance, then, was spasmodic till the time when I moved into the institutional house downtown; there my duties—some of them of a religious nature—ran through seven days of the week and precluded the possibility, even had I had the wish, to attend any religious service outside those four walls.

But now, when I had reached the age of twenty-seven years and was searching as I had never searched before to find something to which I could cling, something to fill up the emptiness of life, I turned to the church again. I tried to divest myself of the critical attitude, to think not at all of my fellow-mortals, but to become as a little child and trust implicitly in the Heavenly Father who in earlier days had been so real to me. If ever any one went to the House of God praying for help, it was I, that Sunday morning that I first carried out the new resolve.

It was a stormy day and I chose a church near by whose pastor was far famed; I had not informed myself, as I might have done through the newspapers, of the subject of that day's discourse. In fact, I had never heard

the pastor preach, but I knew that he was called an orator. I went early to the church and the usher showed me to a good seat up in front; the organ was playing softly, and the light, diffused through stained-glass windows, was chastened and subdued; tablets on the wall commemorated noble lives now ended; there was a hush in the air, a solemnity that fell upon my troubled spirit like a benison. "Why have I cut myself off from all this before?" I asked.

All through the preliminary portion of the service I felt stronger, uplifted; then the pastor rose to announce his text. "The Modern Woman," he thundered through the auditorium. "I shall speak of her to-day." And how he spoke! I can hear him yet!

He told us that smoking, drinking, gambling, lying, and the practice of dishonesty—not to mention the other practices he included in the list—were the favorite pastimes of the women of New York. "What is the home coming to?" he cried. "The bulwark of the nation is the family. Where will this nation be in a few years from now, if family life continues as it is to-day? You —you women," and he pointed the finger of scorn, "determine what family life shall be. What have you made of it? What are you making of it now?" One and all he berated us: esteeming babies of less account than dogs, we were either childless, he proclaimed, or we ignored the children we had brought into the world. "Maternal love is out of date," he cried, and pounded the reading desk in front of him.

It was a long sermon, but the gist of it was that the women of to-day were a disgrace to the name of womanhood. At our door he laid the entire weight of responsibility for the conditions of modern life. "Man is what you make him," he declared.

Much of what he said I have no doubt the clergyman believed: as for the rest—he spoke *ex tempore*—he was probably carried away by the impulse of the moment, by

the passion of the orator. Another Sunday I might have found him helpful. But it wasn't "another Sunday!" It was to-day, and it seemed the irony of fate that such words should fall by chance upon the ears of a woman who was innocent of all those things he charged; one whose misery it was that she could not make a home for somebody; one whose ideals of family life were like the torment of Tantalus: a woman to whom the sight of every little child was verily a stab.

And I was not the only one. Within the sound of that man's voice in his church that day, there must have been many women in like circumstance; and there were hundreds, thousands, who read of what he said: the report of that sermon was spread broadcast throughout the land. And for all those women I am speaking here.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ALISON'S KNOWLEDGE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP REVEALED TO ME

IN the afternoon I went out for a walk. The morning's tirade I had been trying to forget, but with the dreariness outside—it had rained all day—and the solitude indoors, things went from bad to worse. Sundays and holidays were always the hardest to endure; and to-day, after the hopefulness of the resolve to go to church, I suffered the reaction of a deeper loneliness.

However, promising myself to "walk off the blues," I started uptown, bowling along the avenue as if to outdistance all unpleasant thoughts. I had intended to walk back; but the sleety rain that had been falling turned at last to snow, and conditions underfoot were bad. By this time I had lost count of the streets; suddenly finding myself near an Elevated station and realizing all at once that I was a long way from home and very tired, too, I climbed the stairs to the downtown platform. As I stood there waiting for a train, I saw on the uptown platform just across the tracks a little boy alone. He couldn't have been more than six years old. When I first caught sight of him, he was trudging up and down, but presently he seated himself on a bench and I saw that he was crying; checking himself now and then in a child's hiccough of grief, and gazing anxiously around.

He was evidently lost. That part of the city was—comparatively speaking—sparsely settled then; night was coming on and the sight of a little child alone was too much for me. I started to go to him, but, turning back,

as I sprang toward the stairway, for another look at him, I saw his mother—I knew she was his mother from the expression on her face—hurrying through the gateway leading to the platform opposite; another step she took; and I heard the child's cry of welcome and her sob of gratitude as she caught him in her arms. And then the train, thundering down the track between us, shut them from my sight. But the preacher was refuted.

When I reached the boarding house, the servant who admitted me said a lady was waiting for me in the reception-room. "An old lady," she added, in response to my blank look. There was nothing familiar in the aspect of the black-gowned figure that met my gaze in the reception-room; it was only when she began to speak that I recognized Mrs. Shelling, from the suburb of Manchester, where my sister Alison had been brought up.

"Well, Dorothy, I must say you don't keep your old friends posted on your whereabouts," she exclaimed; and then recounted her experiences in trying to find me.

Truth to tell, I was not glad to see her. I remembered her as an inquisitive old woman who probed my deepest wounds, but I reminded myself that she had known my mother and that, well along in years, she had taken much trouble to look me up on her first visit to New York; and I exerted myself to make her feel that she was welcome. I took her to my room and there she grew even more communicative than she had been downstairs. Much of what she said has nothing to do with this narrative. But at last she spoke of Alison, as I had known she would; all along I had been trying to steel myself for that ordeal.

"Well," she asked, "is the ice broke yet between you an' Alison? Because if it ain't, I can give you a piece of news that will surprise you some."

I made no reply; but none was needed. Mrs. Shelling hurried on:

"You know Alison's always been as proud as Lucifer

an' never let on to nobody whether she knew she was adopted. My, that girl has a head! She's taken about all the degrees they've got up there to the college, an' when she graduated—the first time, I mean—they had things printed about her in a book to show how smart she was. It was a class book. It seems she was quite a feather in their cap. You remember Professor Pearse, don't you? Well, he's just the same quiet, dignified old gentleman that he always was. You know he lived across the street from our house before he moved to College Hill. It seems that one of the students in his class quoted Plato one day as authority. 'Yes,' says Professor Pearse, bowin' to Alison, 'Plato an' Miss Coles has said so. It must be so.'

"An' the class printed it to show how smart one of their co-eds was. But as I always said, Alison didn't get her brains from the Coleses. Well, anyway, curiosity run high among the old inhabitants whether Alison knew or didn't know that you an' her was sisters. Of course, Dr. Coles's folks had tried like mad to keep it from her, but now that Mrs. Coles was dead an' the Doctor had one foot in the grave, it seemed only natural that she should be told by somebody. An' there was plenty that would 'ev' liked the job, only they was scared of Alison."

The woman's garrulity was terrible! Why *wouldn't* she come to the point?

"Howsumever, on the street one day somebody up an' asked her right in broad daylight. They do say it was Mrs. Jerbison," here Mrs. Shelling leaned toward me confidentially, "but don't take it as comin' from me. She does beat all f'r curiosity, though I can't say f'r sure whether it was her or no. But at any rate *somebody* stopped Alison on Main Street by the Corner Drug Store an' says in cold blood to her: 'Where's your sister now?' An' Alison she never turned a hair. 'In New York,' says she.

"Then she made some remark about the weather an' went on where she was started for; an' some folks felt easier in their minds, though they couldn't tell to save 'em if she had known before or if it was broke to her that day."

Mrs. Shelling rambled on for a long time afterward, but I heard nothing more: indeed, it was all that I could do to appear to listen courteously, to answer her inquiries, to invite her to remain to supper and not to betray my joy when she declined. I had to hold myself in leash, to remind myself that this woman was an old friend of my family; that she had told me something destined to alter my whole future life, and that I owed her boundless gratitude.

And while I was trying to remember this, one thought was surging through my mind: "Alison knows! Alison knows!" I wanted to be alone and think of this joy that had come to me. Without any dishonorable action on my part, Alison knew that we were sisters. I was like other girls at last. There was somebody that belonged to me.

Meanwhile I sat there waiting for my visitor to leave, trying to forget my own affairs and show interest in hers. The hour seemed interminable. But at last word was sent upstairs that the niece with whom Mrs. Shelling was staying in New York—who had dropped her here on the way downtown—was in the drawing-room. After meeting the niece and making an appointment to see Mrs. Shelling later in the week, I escorted them both to the cab that was in waiting and decorously waved them off.

CHAPTER XL

I WRITE MY SISTER—HER REPLY

WITH a wild throb of joy I rushed upstairs, seized pen and paper, and for the first time in my life wrote to my sister. What I wrote I do not remember now and I did not keep a copy of that letter. I only know I wrote right from my heart, telling her I had just heard she knew of our relationship and suggesting that we meet. I said I had always felt it would be dishonorable for me to reveal myself to her, but now that she knew from another source of our relationship, the ban of silence was removed. As the older sister, the first step devolved on me; and I made it clear, I know, that this day was the happiest of my life.

Then I mailed the letter in the post box on the corner of the street and came back to lie awake all night, building castles in the air, dreaming of a future with Alison; she was but three years my junior, yet I thought of her as a child. Had she been lonely, too? Had she wondered that I did not write before? I would make up to her for all the vanished years. Mrs. Coles was dead: I would be mother and sister both to Alison. Thus ran the swift current of my thoughts; and underneath it all was gratitude to God. At last my prayer was heard. Oh, I would, I would be good.

Next day, as one dazed, I went about my work: in thought I was following the letter to the journey's end and, when I returned to the boarding house at night, I decided that barring accident she had received it now.

For three days, I reckoned, I mustn't look for a reply; unless—the possibility occurred to me—unless she telegraphed! But she would not telegraph, sober second thought reminded me, about a matter so personal. I must wait till Thursday, anyway, without expecting to hear from Alison. And I was content to wait: the revelation of Sunday afternoon had ushered in such a different view of life that I needed a little time to adjust myself to it; and the days passed quickly with so much to look forward to.

But when Thursday came and went, and Friday and Saturday as well, with no word from Alison, I was a little troubled, though I endeavored to make light of my anxiety; the dear child was probably away visiting—"I shall soon know her friends" flashed over me—and the people at home had not forwarded the letter. What if some one else had opened it and destroyed it, that it might never reach her? . . . But this suggestion I rejected. There was only, I repeated to myself, some unavoidable delay. What if she were ill? . . . But no, that would be too cruel. All was well and would continue to be well if I did not fret. What did a few days more or less amount to? All my life I had waited for Alison, and now with the cup so near my lips I would have courage and confidence; and patience above all.

Thus I reasoned for ten days. But my step lagged—except when I came home at night. Every morning when I left the house I thought, "It may be here when I return"; every evening before I went upstairs, I rushed to the dining-room and through the doorway peered to my place at table, where my mail was always put when there was mail for me.

On the evening of the eleventh day I found the letter there! I was late, it chanced, and several people had already come down to the dining-room. I was vaguely conscious that some one spoke to me, but I couldn't rouse

myself to make reply: I could only seize the letter and hurry to my room.

There, with trembling fingers, I struck a match and lighted the gas; then gazed long at the envelope, observing each minute detail. The letter was in my hand—but I was afraid to open it! Realizing this, I laughed, a little unsteadily. "Afraid?" I said—and for a moment hugged the letter close. Then I opened it and read:

"My dear Miss Baldwin:

"I received your letter several days ago and have waited about writing because I feared my letter would give you pain. I cannot answer you otherwise than frankly: I am happy, my life is full of love and pleasure. There is not one spark of sentiment in my composition. I have known always, as in a dream, my own story, but the matter-of-fact side of my life is the only one that impresses me.

"The love for my father, for the mother, whose death two and a half years ago is the only shadow of all these years, and for my aunt, is so strong that it utterly precludes the possibility of any other relationship. Don't you see that any sentimental forming of ties which, through nearly my whole life, have not actually existed, would make me feel that I was casting off the ones I have known and loved so long? If you and I were to meet accidentally, as any two girls might, we should probably become friends, because of the mutual sympathies which two well-educated persons must have. But I tell you honestly that nothing more would be possible for me.

"It has not been easy for me to write you so plainly, because I hardly dare to hope that you will not judge me harshly; but my own conscience would not allow me to be anything but sincere.

"Will you believe that I am glad of your success—of which I have heard from others—and that I hope it will continue?

"Very cordially yours,
"Alison Coles."

The first time I read it, I didn't take in the meaning; but the second time, I read it aloud—very slowly. Then my hand fell open and the paper fluttered to the floor. I had been standing by the gas-jet near the window, but now I dropped into a chair, stretched my arms out on the table in front of me and bowed my head. I sat there a long time.

My first thought, when at last I was conscious of thought in the blur of misery, was, "This is the end." But by and by I realized that something still remained to do. Alison feared that I would judge her harshly. I must reassure her on that point. And so I penned the following reply:

"I am glad you have written me an honest letter. And I do not judge you harshly. You misunderstood me sadly, if you thought I asked you to cast off the relationships of your life and substitute me, an entire stranger, in their place. Such action is unthinkable, and I cannot see that an acquaintance with me would have implied it. I have always realized that people are congenial or uncongenial independent of the accident of birth. The latter is beyond one's control, while friends are self-chosen. But when they in whose veins the same blood chances to flow are also friends, the friendship has, I fancy, an added element of strength.

"Whether an acquaintance between us would have had such outcome, neither of us can say. But now that I know your mind I abide by your decision.

"With best wishes for you now and always, and appreciating the position in which my letter placed you, I remain,

"Sincerely yours,

"DOROTHY BALDWIN."

As I wrote the address, two big tears splashed down on the "Alison." But I took another envelope and tried again; and this time I kept back the tears. I placed the

letter in this second envelope and mailed it, as I had mailed the other letter less than two weeks before, in the post box at the corner of the street; then, with the feeling that I had reached the end of everything, I went back to the house.

CHAPTER XLI

THE DEPTHS OF LONELINESS

THE letter from Alison plunged me into profound, persistent melancholy. Thus far there had always been rebound from the shock of disappointment; after every blow, innate buoyancy (which I had striven to increase) had come to my relief. But now the feeling of finality encompassed me. It was as if the whole fabric of my life, built up painstakingly for twenty-seven years, had suddenly toppled over and crashed down upon my head. And I had no strength, no wish, to build it up again.

For the first time, the oncoming of the spring made no appeal to me. Every morning on the way to business, I walked down through Central Park from Seventy-second Street to take the Elevated train, and late in the afternoon returned by the same route. But I, who heretofore had been alive to beauty everywhere, was blind to all I saw. The tender green of grass and foliage, the swelling buds, the scent of earth and growing things, the countless manifestations on all sides of nature's wondrous resurrection, wakened in me no answering cry of joy, no dawn of hopefulness.

And here I must go back a little to relate something which has a distinct bearing on the state of mind of which I am writing now: primarily the profound depression which persisted through that spring was brought about by the communication from Alison, but it was due in great part, as well, to all the cumulative influences of my life.

It so happened that two of my school-girl friends lived not very far away; they were married and belonged to the class of moderately well-to-do suburbanites who make up so large a share of the population near New York. Ever since my coming to the city these friends had frequently invited me to visit them; at first I accepted eagerly, but as time went on I put in appearance only at rare intervals. This was not from any lessening of cordiality on the part of my old friends: each assured me that the latch-string was always out and, attributing to disinclination the fact that I seldom availed myself of her hospitality, she accused me of having acquired the New Yorker's scorn of the commuter's mode of life.

What could I say? I could not tell either of those friends the truth: that I would give anything on earth for a home like hers; that the sight of her in possession of what I craved but couldn't get made my own existence all the drearier; that after a Sunday spent in looking on at her happiness, listening to her confidences, playing with her babies, I returned to the city robbed of all my fortitude. Time and time again I have been to the country for the week-end and, after living up to my reputation for high spirits, keeping up before my friends until traintime, I have come back to cry my eyes out through the long hours of a sleepless night.

And so by and by I gave up the attempt. My friends seemed a little hurt by what they termed my "neglect" of them; but after all, one way or the other, it didn't matter much. Each of the two was very naturally absorbed in her family, and the presence or absence of outsiders carried little weight. Accordingly we drifted apart. But when I moved from the settlement to West Seventy —— Street, I determined to get in touch with my friends again. Jubilant over my escape from residence in a houseful of women, it seemed to me that I was beginning life once more; everything looked bright, and I wrote at once to those two schoolmates, explaining

that I had more leisure now and asking if they could meet me in the city some time soon for luncheon and a chat? They replied that family cares made it hard for them to go from home and suggested that I come to them instead. This I did.

The week following the Sunday that I spent with one of them, I received a letter from her; it was a long letter, too, for her to write whose communications were usually confined to telegraphic brevity. "I want to say something to you," she began, "that I did not dare to say when you were here. Dorothy, dear, you are making a mistake. You ought to marry and have a home. A business career may be well enough for some women, but you are not that kind. I have seen you with my children and I know."

Then she went on to tell me of her happiness. What she said was very beautiful, and I read it with the tears streaming down my face. She was five years my senior, had been married for eleven years, and was the mother of four children, the youngest two years old. "Of course, you don't realize at present," she declared, "what the future will be like if you go on as you are. You are young and light-hearted now, but by and by it will be different. There's nothing that makes up for the love of the man one loves; nothing that makes up for one's child. I don't want you to cut yourself off from the best."

I laid the letter down and wiped my eyes. So I "didn't realize!" Didn't realize, when all my life I had been fighting to hide the misery from which I could find no way of escape! The friend who wrote the letter was a sweet woman: but she had married young, she couldn't understand. It had been so easy, so natural for her to move from one home to the other, to become the wife of the man she loved, while at the same time she remained a devoted father's only child; her life had been so normal from the start that she didn't appreciate the position

of one whose life was different. She didn't know instinctively that I summoned buoyancy in self-defense. And of course I never told.

There was more of the letter, and I read it carefully, with gratitude for her kind thought of me. But what she thought was so mistaken! She wrote as if I were stubbornly pursuing a life of "single blessedness," when all I had to do to change it was to choose among a host of eligibles! There was no reason, save perhaps the wish that was father to the thought, why she should have fastened on such absurd surmise. Certainly I never said anything to create such a false impression; indeed, I avoided—since it was a painful subject—all reference to men. The truth was there was not one eligible man among my acquaintances. The only men I met were those who lived in the boarding house; most of them were married, anyway, and as for the others—they were so impossible that not even she with all her enthusiasm for the married state, not even I in my depths of loneliness, could consider any one of them.

Evidently it never occurred to this good friend of mine, either now or in earlier years when I visited her more often, to acquaint me with the men she knew. In saying this I am not complaining: there may not have been any desirable men who were still unmarried in the small suburb where she lived, or she may have thought they wouldn't like me, or the trouble and expense for hospitality that such meeting would entail may have been too burdensome, or her husband may have been by nature unsociable. It doesn't matter what the reason was. My friend was occupied with the affairs of her own family; that she thought of me at all may have been greater generosity than I should have shown, had the cases been reversed. It is easy enough to think the opposite: but one never can be sure beforehand. And I am inclined to think that happiness has a tendency to make human beings selfish; or at least to render them disinclined to

effort in behalf of others. I only mention this episode to show, with reference to what was to come, the effect it had on me.

All through that spring, then, every incident served only to deepen the depression that submerged me when I read my sister's answer to the letter I wrote her; every breath of spring, every indication of pulsing life around me, seemed to echo Alison's refusal, seemed to cut me off from any share in the joy of life. I was incapable of plowing my way through the slough of despondency. I was trying only to accustom myself to it, trying only to endure.

By and by endurance came to seem impossible. "These conditions are unnatural," I said. "I must put an end to them." And then I was face to face again with the old question, "How?" There was nothing in the past to which I could turn: it must be something new.

CHAPTER XLII

THE "PERSONAL COLUMN"

AGAIN it was Sunday, the day I dreaded above all else, excepting holidays, which were like a month of Sundays rolled in one. After the attempt at church-going of which a previous chapter told, I could not bring myself to try again. The very thought of church called up not only the morning, when full of hope I started in to resume the habit of my childhood, but even more vividly the evening of the same day, when there came to me the news of Alison that prompted me to write to her.

And so the church bells, as I heard them, brought no invitation; instead, they seemed to sound the knell that shut me out from all experience, except suffering. And I had suffered so much, had fought so long to repress emotion, that it was not possible for me at this time to take a calm, sane view of anything. I was on the verge of suicide. Every avenue of life seemed to be closed to me. But the portal of death I could open if I chose.

And yet I think I was saner than some women are in like circumstance; for I realized my danger, I understood my plight—and how I hated it! I wanted to be normal, to have serenity and poise. "But how can I," I cried, "when in spite of myself every condition of my life is abnormal?"

I couldn't see any way to change conditions, and I knew I couldn't go on much longer as I was; knew, too, that grief wouldn't kill me soon. My constitution was good and, realizing from the start that health was my

only capital, I had always done everything in my power to keep strong and well. Such profound depression, as that from which I had suffered all this spring, would lower my vitality I knew, and probably in time I should succumb to some slow, lingering disease. But I had no money and no inclination for invalidism; everything in my make-up rebelled against such a future. I wanted to live, if I could live normally; if I couldn't—and it looked as if I couldn't—then death, sudden death by my own hand, seemed the only alternative. With the iteration of despair, I went over and over the arguments for suicide and against it, pacing meanwhile up and down the floor.

Birds were singing just outside my windows. The sweetness and persistence of their song breaking in at last on my fixity of musing, I halted to look at them and listen. They had built a nest in one of the trees in a back yard across the way and were now hovering and twittering around it; their little lives presented an aspect of permanence, of solidarity, that was utterly lacking to my own existence. "It's because it takes two to build a nest," I thought, "whether they are birds or humans." Then I turned back to the room that I had tried so hard to make look like a home. It was big and bleak and empty; and I fled outdoors.

For a time I wandered aimlessly up Columbus Avenue, then went east, and by and by turned in at the Park. But I didn't feel like walking: I didn't feel like anything. I had come out because I couldn't stay indoors, and now in Central Park I sat down on the first shaded bench I found that was unoccupied; I could hear the music from a church not far away and also the songs of many birds. But I cared for none of them.

Then I began to watch the people: it seemed to me I was the only solitary creature in the Park that day. In twos and threes and groups of half a dozen they passed the bench where I was sitting. There were family

parties, evidently setting out for a holiday: the father smoking contentedly, the mother a little flurried with the exertion of getting them all started in good season, but with a happy expression on her face; and the children bright and rosy, dressed in their Sunday best. There were young lovers, too, blind to everything except each other: their hard, unfeeling happiness flaunting in the eyes of misery.

If I had stopped to think, I should have known that all this was right and natural; I should have rejoiced in what I saw. But I was suffering so acutely that I couldn't "stop to think." It was not that I grudged others their happiness. But all my being clamored for its share. The contrast between my own desolate existence and that of the passers-by robbed me of all sense but hunger. "Other people have their share," rose unbidden to my lips. "Why must I be starved?"

The same impulse that drove me from the boarding house now goaded me to further activity. "If I walk a long, long way and get all tired out, perhaps I can go home and sleep," I thought, and rose from the bench with the intention of walking to the upper end of Central Park and then on to One Hundred and Fifty-fifth Street. For months I had not been sleeping well and I was tired all the time. But additional physical fatigue, if it would bring respite from mental agony by inducing sleep, must be purchased at all costs.

And so I started; but the sun was now nearly overhead and the day was very warm. I kept meeting happy, radiant creatures, and by and by I was aware that tears were running down my cheeks. I dashed them away, but it did no good, others took their place. At last I caught some one—a young girl she was, with all the hall-marks of youth's freshness and beauty upon her—glancing at me curiously as she passed; and the conviction was borne in upon me, that, if I had no more self-control than to cry in public, it was high time I went

home. What if I should meet some of the people from the settlement? Or some of the women from uptown with whom my work brought me in touch?

In the daily round of business, women had often appealed to me in difficulty: they looked on me, I knew, as endowed with strength, common sense, and resourcefulness. I stopped right where I was: no one was in sight, and at that spot in Central Park it was as if I were in some forest wilderness. "I have counseled others wisely, so they say," I thought. "Can I not save myself?" And then and there I made up my mind that some way—how I did not know—I would work out my own salvation. Having come to this decision, I turned, and dry-eyed made my way to the nearest exit on Eighth Avenue.

As I crossed the street to board a downtown car, for I now meant to go home at once, a newsstand at the corner caught my eye, and I bought two Sunday papers. My own copy of the journal that I regularly read lay unopened in my room; the two that I had just now purchased were papers that I rarely saw. But with the three of them to open up different fields of activity, I felt I ought to hit on something that should serve as a new interest, something that should save me from myself.

Thus far I have said nothing of the people in the Seventy —— Street boarding house; most of them were women and, seeing so many women in the course of business every day, I didn't care for more of feminine society. There were a few men in the household, too, but to them as well I was indifferent: most of them were married, anyway, and not one among them could be compared with the married men at Mrs. Miggs's. However, when I first went to Seventy —— Street, I resolved to be affable to every one; the people were not prepossessing, to be sure, but I reasoned that when I knew them better I should find much to respect and like. I had an idea that in the past people in boarding houses had some-

times thought me unapproachable, and this time I determined not to give offense.

Accordingly, from the day that I moved in, I met half-way all overtures toward sociability. My room was large and people formed the habit of dropping in there after dinner. Women who could lie abed till noon often kept me up till past midnight with accounts of what "he" said and what "she" said—when neither of them said anything that could possibly be of interest to any one except themselves—and obliged me to listen to gossip and share in varied forms of pettiness. By and by I learned that, in self-defense, a working woman cannot afford to see much of the people in her boarding house; if she does, they make such demands upon her time as to unfit her for her work. My fellow-boarders were all well-meaning and I wished them well. But it was impossible to cultivate any closer relations than those demanded by ordinary civility. So I went my way and let them go theirs.

This, I think, is a truthful picture of the situation in that boarding house at the time of which I write. Of late, I had been conscious that people speculated on the change in my appearance since I moved into the house, but I cared not what they thought. To-day, however, as the street-car carried me and the two Sunday newspapers nearer and nearer to my destination, I recognized in myself an awakening interest. The mere resolve to find some way out of my isolation, the instinct against despair, was revivifying. As I alighted from the car and hurried home to dinner, I was glad that I was late: there would be fewer people in the dining-room to notice my red eyes.

I had more appetite for dinner than for a long time before, and when the meal was finished it was inspiriting to think that I actually had a reason for hurrying upstairs: I was going to "find a way or make one" to a new interest! My ideas were a little vague as to how

this could be done; but, once inside my room, I resolutely sat me down to the task of searching through the columns of the three bulky newspapers, as one on whom the responsibility devolves of finding—not a needle, but a jewel—in a haymow. If one is to find the jewel, courage must be high.

First I went through the news columns, for it seemed to me that a careful study of what other people were doing in the world might be fruitful in suggestion concerning the employment of my own spare time and energy. But the activities pursued by the people of whom I read in those three newspapers—there was a deal of repetition—demanded more time and money than I had. Departures for Europe were chronicled; space was lavished on the flittings of fashionable folk at home; taking the baths abroad was recommended, and the advantages of bicycling were enlarged upon.

All this was excellent for those for whom it was intended. But it didn't fit my needs. What cared I, who must spend the summer in New York, who had not a living soul to go even to Coney Island with me, for the steamers' sailing lists, for descriptions of costumes suitable for foreign spas, for the attractions of a monster hotel soon to open in the mountains, for a thousand cinder paths?

I had always thought that if I lived in the country I should be an enthusiastic bicyclist. But in the city and alone I had never had courage to mount a wheel; in fact, I had never been near enough a wheel to experiment. To be sure, I had seen young women—some of them unaccompanied—on bicycles in town darting in and out of traffic in the crowded streets; but the sight awoke in me only wonder that they dared. There was a good deal in my make-up of the old-fashioned woman who hates to go anywhere alone, and now I passed by without interest an article entitled, "Etiquette of the Cinder Path."

Wistfully I read of bowling clubs in different parts of

town: most of them were holding the last meeting of the season now. Bowling, I thought, would be good exercise and good fun, but how could a girl alone knock for admittance at the doors of a bowling club? She must have friends to open such doors for her.

There was mention also of riding clubs; and the final meeting (for a season prolonged through the lateness of the spring) of dancing classes was reported at some length, with the list of patronesses for the coming winter. Here again I was confronted in my mind's eye by squadrons of floor managers, by the frown of chaperons, by the whole mechanism of conventions in which I had no part. In college I had learned to dance, and enjoyed it very much; but since the summer at the seashore—six years ago, it was—when I met Paul Forsythe, I had not danced a step, save occasionally with some of the girls at the settlement when I was in residence: there had been no opportunity. And now to read of young men and girls really meeting, bowling, riding, dancing, was like reading of another world with which I had no means of communication.

Week-end parties at country homes were written up, house boats, gayeties in prospect for the coming season at near-by resorts; also the opening of roof gardens in New York. But what had this to do with me? I must spend the summer between the office and my boarding place. I couldn't go out for pleasure in the evening by myself.

In those three newspapers I searched long for some advice for "The Girl Alone in New York in the Summer Time." But that girl wasn't in the newspapers: there seemed to be no place for her in anybody's scheme of things. Yet she was here in thousands! She was here (so much the worse for her) to stay! Established in the city, she had no chance elsewhere. What was she to do?

With a deep sigh of discouragement I threw down the

newspapers. "A woman alone seems to be a criminal," I said. Then new determination answered me. "But I'm not a criminal, and I will find a place or make one." And I took up the newspapers again.

The telegraphic news brought word of a wonderful discovery that was destined, so the prediction ran, to revolutionize one branch of surgery. There were accounts of recent excavations in the Roman forum, and records of experiments in the field of scientific research. All this I read for the sake of general information, but I couldn't make it fit my case. I was no genius, no scholar, no scientist: I was a woman half-dead of loneliness, out of her element, trying to find the way back into harmony with life.

Finally I discarded the telegraphic news, the social gossip, the poetry, the book reviews, the pages devoted to matters of the theater and to the sporting news, and turned my attention to the comic supplement and the advertisements. Ordinarily both of these I scorned. But to-day it was different. If in the gaudy pages of the comic supplement or in the acres of advertisements there lurked one idea that I could turn to practical advantage, I was determined not to let it slip.

But the comic supplement seemed to be utterly devoid of sense; with the best will in the world to be diverted, I was only bored; with eagerness to seize upon ideas, I found not one idea to seize: so I threw those pages in the scrap basket, where the other sections now reposed, and gathering together all the advertisements pinned my hopes thereto.

First I turned to the columns dealing with instruction, for I thought perhaps I might take up some branch of study. Studying in itself was not attractive, but, as possible means of giving me something new to think about, it might be worth a try; or—I remembered the college days when I presided over a "district school"—I might find somebody to teach. Other things being

equal, it would be better to have money coming in than going out.

What branches then was I qualified to teach? The rudiments, of course, and possibly I still retained some fragment of the classics: Latin and Greek comprised the only portion of the college curriculum that I had ever studied with interest, and I was so rusty now that I would better brush up first. But my time was very limited, either for studying or teaching: practically I had only the evening free, and I doubted whether I could find pupils to spend the long summer evenings with the dead languages. Still, one never knew until she tried, and in almost a column of advertisements pertaining to instruction something worth while might be found.

Inspection soon disclosed a sameness in all of them: there were plenty of notices of schools and "business colleges," and several persons made it known that they were prepared to remedy the defects of a neglected education in the shortest time and at the lowest rates: there were also dancing "academies" that "positively guaranteed the waltz in five lessons and with the strictest privacy!" And from varied samples of publicity, I gleaned that almost anything from massage to advertising could be speedily and successfully taught by mail.

The tone of all this repelled me. I had no money to throw away on catch-penny devices. It struck me as a little strange that so many, many people wanted to give lessons, and that almost nobody wanted to be taught. There was, however, one advertisement inserted ostensibly by a mother (whose son needed coaching in Latin and mathematics) that looked as if it would be worth investigating. But morning hours for lessons were insisted on and, as I was busy in the office far downtown from nine o'clock till five—and it was almost always half-past five before I could start home—the only desirable advertisement in the whole realm of instruction was beyond my reach.

Then I searched the "help wanted" columns. Stenographers, it seemed, were greatly in demand; also cooks, waitresses, parlor maids, second girls, scrub women, workers on fancy feathers, errand girls, laundresses. But the longer I looked the more I was convinced that it was next to impossible for a woman like myself to find work for her leisure time.

And I needn't have been surprised. For years our society had maintained a high class employment bureau; from my efforts in behalf of others, I knew the difficulty of "placing" a woman like myself and the difficulty was, of course, increased when only evening hours were at one's command. I had known it all before: but to-day I had seized upon the advertising columns like a drowning man clutching at a straw.

There were, of course, good positions for women in New York. I had one myself, and never had I so deeply appreciated it as since my meeting with Mr. Vilmerding. But such positions were not as a rule secured through newspaper advertisement. Mine I had secured eight years ago through Mrs. Yorke, and were she now in business I believed that I should apply to her to find, if possible, something for me to do in the evening, though I had an idea that she would refuse on the ground that I was already working hard enough.

But at all events I couldn't go to Mrs. Yorke. She had given up business, and in my heart I shrank from telling her or any go-between the real reason for my search. It wasn't that I stood in any particular need of money; I could live, and save something, too, on my salary. But I was so desperately lonely, the evenings were so long! I wasn't made for such existence. I couldn't, couldn't stand it!

All at once the courage, the determination that had buoyed me up, collapsed and I was in the depths, just where I had been before; only with less strength to rise.

There was no one on earth who cared what became of

me. I had a sister, yes; but I might better have had none, for then I shouldn't have been hoping all my life —as I now realize I had hoped secretly—that some day we should meet. The hope was shattered now and I was the more desolate for having cherished it. Of Alison, my sister, I had never spoken to any one; all through the years, I couldn't bring myself to utter one syllable. But now it seemed that if I could open my heart to somebody —not *any one,* but somebody—the effect of the long-continued repression would be softened somewhat and life in future would be easier to bear.

For I knew now that I must go on living: whatever else to-day had done or failed to do, it had shown me that. But how to live bravely and worthily? I thought that I could bear, that I would bear without complaint, any agony except that of loneliness; I was not afraid of work, of physical suffering, of poverty, if only I need not be alone. A verse, that I had cut out from a newspaper years before and memorized, now recurred to me:

> And two shall walk some narrow way of life
> So nearly side by side that should one turn
> Ever so little space to left or right
> They needs must stand acknowledged face to face;
> And yet with wistful eyes that never meet,
> With groping hands that never clasp, and lips
> Calling in vain to ears that never hear,
> They seek each other all their weary days
> And die unsatisfied—and this is Fate!

There had been two verses: the first dealt with the two who meet. This I did not keep, for even then, when I first read it, I seemed to feel the inappropriateness to my own existence of the joy it chronicled. But the second verse—the one I memorized—seemed to have been made for me. The name of the author was not given in the newspaper from which I cut the verse and I never knew who wrote it. It didn't matter who wrote it: the

words were always with me, they were part of my daily experience.

For a long time after I had exhausted the resources of the "help wanted" advertisements, I sat there with the several sections of the paper in my hands. But I wasn't reading: I was thinking of the path that I had traveled all the way from grandfather's.

"When the game of dice breaks up," somebody has said, "he who lost lingers sorrowfully behind, going over the throws and learning by his grief." But I couln't see where I might have won anything that I had missed; I couldn't see, save in the case of Mr. Vilmerding, where I could have avoided any unhappiness. Except for that brief incident, which came about through my honest but mistaken search for work, there was nothing—so it seemed to me—for which I was to blame. I had done the best I know: this was the result.

Then all at once I realized that the afternoon was gone—and I had found nothing! Tossing the last of the newspapers onto the pile in the scrap basket, I rose with a sense of utter helplessness and stretched out my arms.

"The world is wide," I said. "Isn't there some one else who is lonely, too? Somebody who would understand about Alison—and everything?"

The silence of the room seemed to mock at me, the four walls to hurl down on me a pall, black and smothering. "Oh, God!" I cried; and flung myself upon the couch. With closed eyes I lay there, seeing the questions to which there was no answer go round and round like the hands of a clock.

When at last I opened my eyes, the first object I observed was the scrap basket which, too fragile for its heavy weight, had toppled to one side. In straightening it, I took out a portion of its load; and in my systematic way placed the sections of the newspapers thus removed in a pile alongside, so that the maid next morning would understand that they too were to be thrown away.

In doing this, I chanced upon a portion of one newspaper which early in the afternoon I had discarded as of no avail. It was the first page and, among the "Deaths," a familiar name sprang out at me; but when I looked more closely I saw it was nobody I knew.

"In the seventy-third year of her age," the notice read.

"I wonder if I'll have to live as long as that?" I mused, haunted by the vision of my solitary figure moving slowly down the vista of the years ahead.

Then the advertisements in the column at the left of the "Marriages and Deaths"—the "Personals"—caught my eye; and idly I read some of them. They differed widely in form and phraseology, but for every one of them there was this invarying close: "object, matrimony."

In a general way I had known that certain newspapers published advertisements like these, and I remembered having heard persons in boarding houses whom I considered decidedly ill-bred refer to them with a laugh or a knowing look, accompanied by the remark, "A personal *says*, 'object matrimony'; it *means* 'object to matrimony.'"

This I always took to be a reference to the ways of criminals and adventurers: as such I resented it. There was vileness in the world, of course; but that was no excuse, I said to myself, for polluting the air that decent people breathed by talking of it: much less for making it a joke. However, the would-be facetious boarder, which type I fancy every boarding house contains, continued to include ridicule of "personals" in his list of pleasantries, along with the mother-in-law joke, the quip at the expense of the bank-cashier-skipping-to-Canada, the yarn about the money he had lent, and those comments on the food which with him were customary at the dinner hour.

My idea of "personals," therefore, based on no certain knowledge of my own, was of necessity colored by

what I heard; and in unconscious imitation I, too, had soon learned to sniff in orthodox superiority and to turn the page at once when the personal column met my eye.

But to-day, for the first time in my life, I read a personal: more than that I read the whole column through. There was one I read three times: it was signed "X. Y." And I didn't laugh or sneer. I was too sincere in groping toward the light, and too forlorn as well, to be disdainful now of any will-o'-the-wisp which for the moment might illumine the dark path I trod. I had lived close to realities too long, so I assured myself, to be frightened by appearances: though, for the matter of that, there seemed to be nothing in what I read to cause any one alarm. It all looked respectable. Why delve beneath the surface, then, for motives which were probably not there?

Presently I took up the cudgels in defense of those, reference to whom I had heretofore considered unfit for a girl to hear. What right had I, what right had any one to brand as evil the whole mass of personals, to dispose of them wholesale by the flippant phrase, "rotten to the core?" What right to attribute thought of wrong to those who might be innocent? Why, there might be some girl like me in that company! There might even be—perhaps—somebody who— But no: old habits, old restraints, the prejudices I had inherited, the cynical expressions I had heard, checked the wild flight of my mind. I smiled a little bitterly and with another glance at "X. Y.'s" description of himself (which I had already read three times) I folded the newspaper with unnecessary vim and tucked it at the bottom of the pile.

After supper—the dreary Sunday evening meal in a boarding house to which only those repair who have nowhere else to go—I made myself attend a religious service in the settlement. It was a long way down there and I hated going anywhere by myself at night; but this time it was easier than to stay at home, in a room that

was crowded full of the consciousness of one page of a newspaper that lay hidden at the bottom of the pile.

In the old environment again with the girls I met on weekdays, apparently surprised and pleased by my presence at the Sunday evening class which they themselves conducted, the realm of the habitual asserted its supremacy; even to peer beyond the confines of routine took on the semblance of unreality, while the world where "personals" existed receded to such distance that I could not span the interval. The picture of myself bending over the first page of that newspaper was like recollection of a dream.

But on the way home in the Elevated train, the sense of my exclusion from the common lot again laid hold on me with a grip like that of an enemy who for awhile has apparently relaxed his vigilance, but in reality has been watching his chance to secure a firmer hold; having secured it, he returns to the attack with energy tenfold.

As I looked about me, I saw men and women chatting of everyday affairs with the easy familiarity that does not always breed contempt; in some instances I marked the air of comradeship, the subtle sense of togetherness to which I was at all times alert. The people in the car appeared to be respectable, I thought; and I fell to wondering how their acquaintance had begun. Perhaps some of these couples had been to school together; others had doubtless been introduced by friends or had found each other in any one of half a dozen ways society approves. If some of them had met for the first time under unconventional circumstances, whose business was it but their own? What did it matter now? They had met: that was the main thing.

"If a girl has no chance to make acquaintances conventionally, what is she going to do?" I asked myself. "Must she be all her life alone because society takes no heed of her? What have I to do with society, anyway? I, an isolated fragment of humanity with no place of my

own, with nobody that belongs to me, with no knowledge of anything in life but suffering? To whom am I responsible?''

These questionings persisted till I reached the boarding house. As I opened the door into my own room from the hall, a draught of air—a window opposite was open wide and a strong wind had sprung up—caught and blew across the floor the topmost papers I had heaped beside the scrap basket. Hastily I collected and replaced them, then, more slowly, pulled out from the bottom of the pile the section that contained the personals. I took it to the light and ran my finger down the column till I found the one signed ''X. Y.'' It didn't take long: I knew just where it was.

Then I compared ''X. Y.'s'' description of himself with the mental picture I retained of the men I had just now been studying in the Elevated train. ''Why, that sounds better than any of those men looked. . . . There's nothing to criticise in that. . . . What if I should answer it?''

In recoil I started back; and, turning violently, confronted my own reflection in the mirror, shamefaced and horrified. ''Oh, I can't,'' I gasped. ''I can't.''

CHAPTER XLIII

MRS. WELLS ASSISTS

ALL through the week it went on like that, my mind fluctuating between two extremes; contemplating now this contingency, now that; weighing, in so far as I was able, all the pros and cons. When I came home from business Monday evening, it was a relief to find that the chambermaid had removed the newspaper; later in the week I wished that it were there. All the time I thought of it—and wondered what to do.

But by Saturday evening I had made up my mind that, if "X. Y." reappeared in next day's "personals," I would write to him. I had no intention of using my own name, of course, nor of giving my address. I remembered having seen in various small shops the inconspicuous sign, "Private letter boxes." I also remembered that, seeing such signs, I had drawn aside my skirts!

"That was because I didn't know," said I. "There's no combination so inflexible as youth and ignorance." But all the same, the thought of the arrangements I must make was not pleasant to dwell on; yet, having decided to venture, I was determined not to flinch.

With the decision of Saturday, which put an end to the controversy with myself, I drew a long breath of relief. After suspense, certainty of any kind makes for peace of mind, temporarily, at least; and that night, for the first time in months, I slept well.

Sunday morning when I awoke, it was with the impression of standing on the threshold of a day destined to be fraught with consequence. I had turned my back on

the hard path of the actual: before me loomed the great Perhaps. I did not deceive myself with the belief that the future would necessarily be easier than the past. I *hoped* it would be easier: at all events it would be different. And change of some kind was imperative. There was in me nothing of the spirit of the girl who is bent upon amusement. It was all dead earnest. I had tried, to no avail, everything else within my power. Only this remained; and I was prepared to make the most of it.

I went to the window and looked out: it was raining, with the slow persistence that promises a long, wet day. The occasional grumble of distant thunder seemed to say the showers had passed over to some more favored spot; in the city we were doomed to all-day dreariness.

After breakfast I stole out to the newsstand on the corner and bought a copy of the newspaper that contained the "personals." It was cumbersome and bulky, but all that counted was the outside page. This I turned inside, the better to shield it from the wet, tucked the whole thing underneath my arm, shifted my umbrella, and trudged back to the house.

In my room again, first of all I locked the door: ordinarily the door was never locked in daytime. But this day was different. Next I removed everything from the reading table in the center of the room and dragged the table near the window, where I could have better light; but not too near, lest somebody (for the moment I forgot that the backyard's only occupants were birds) should see what I was about to do; then I spread out the first page of the newspaper on the table in front of me and sat down to my search.

I looked long and carefully through the one column and a half of personals: but "X. Y." wasn't there. The personality which, masked beneath these letters, last Sunday, flashed across my vision from some realm unknown, had receded to that realm to-day, and I was none the wiser. Phrases in his description of himself recurred to

memory, because of the sincerity I read in (or into) them, and I wondered if his experiment had turned out successfully.

Truth to tell, it was a disappointment not to find "X. Y." where I expected him. All the week I had been screwing up my courage to write to him to-day. I had even decided on a nom de plume and had composed (only to reject) half a dozen different versions of the opening paragraph. I hadn't rented a private letter box as yet: that ordeal was so terrible that I was putting it off as long as possible. But I had resolved to write the letter to-day; and to-morrow morning on my way downtown, after engaging a letter box in a stationery shop I had in mind, to add a postscript, giving the address. But the plans it had taken all my courage to perfect now vanished in thin air. "X. Y." wasn't there!

But other people were—a column and a half of them! Possibly "X. Y." himself, under another name, was of the company. If not, what did it signify? I knew no more of him than of any stranger, save that his personal last Sunday, far from offending my notions of propriety, commanded my respect: there might be others equally desirable to-day.

If there were, I couldn't find them. Perhaps I suffered from defective sight: perhaps my vision was distorted by the gossip I had heard. But all I saw looked sordid and impossible.

"But there must be something else," I cried, "if I could only find it!" And then the suggestion came to me to insert a personal myself in next Sunday's issue.

It was overpowering at first. I shrank in every fiber from all that it implied. But I remembered, too, my resolve not to be afraid of the unknown: to work out my own salvation. "This experiment is repugnant. But it involves no compromise between right and wrong, no sacrifice of principle. My hesitation proves only that I am a slave to prejudice."

"But if you published a personal," argued the inner voice, "you would be misinterpreted."

"Possibly," I answered. "But that is nothing new. Paul Forsythe was mistaken in what he thought at Albany. Mr. Vilmerding misunderstood me, too. A young woman alone is always under suspicion in the eyes of somebody." And then the more I thought of it, the more it seemed to me that, despite the apparent contradiction at first sight, there was really less danger here than elsewhere of being misunderstood by any given individual.

The mass of scoffers would, of course, look upon my personal—if they noticed it at all—as another target for their scorn. But the shafts of thoughtless persons (to whom, furthermore, my identity would always be unknown) had little power to wound. I had penetrated too far into the heart of suffering to be very much disturbed by a mere surface scratch. My own self-respect was the court of last appeal: that did not condemn me. And I felt that I could write a personal so instinct with sincerity and truth that, should it chance to meet the eye of one endowed with the same qualities himself, it would ring true.

The tone of the replies (assuming that there were replies) would in each instance enable me to form some opinion of the writer's character. If that opinion warranted further communication, well and good: if not, I should be no worse off than before; for an evil-minded person would betray himself at once and be eliminated without ever meeting me. In no case would an interview result, until (or unless) I was convinced that the man in question would not misunderstand the kind of girl I was.

I winced at the necessity of employing the stereotyped expression "object, matrimony," but there seemed to be no help for it. If it lacked finesse, so, too—perhaps—did it afford defense. I didn't know: but I reasoned that the right kind of man would understand the attitude of a

girl like me. I could imagine having a genuine liking and respect for many men I shouldn't wish to marry, and I assumed a similar point of view in man. At any rate the possibility of marriage was too remote to be considered now. If this method should result in my meeting a man whom I could respect, a man whose mentality I liked, the acquaintance—no matter how devoid of sentiment—would be a benefit. But dared I risk the experiment?

Once again I went over my own problem from the time my mother died and I was left an unwelcome child of six at grandfather's; I relived the loneliness of those early years whose only solace had been dreams of Alison, the baby sister from whom I was kept apart. I knew that, when at fifteen I ran away from grandfather's to get an education as means of self-support, it was yearning for my sister that made me choose the University of Manchester, where at least I could be near her. The college years, with all their agony, came back to me and the impulse that had sent me to New York; one by one, the eight years in the city passed in procession now, each repeating in its turn, but with deepening emphasis, the same story of heartache. I was as familiar with the wreck of each day's wishes as with the setting of the sun.

But through all the disillusions, the hope concerning Alison had endured until her letter killed it. I was now at the end of my resources: if I rejected the experiment of the newspaper personal, what remained for me?

I stared straight ahead out into the back yard of the boarding house, where everything was sodden, silent, bare; always the rain brushed against the window pane. With its insistent buffeting, it seemed to echo the question that was beating in on me: "Are you going to run the risk? Are you?"

Finally I answered it. "Yes," I said, taking up a pencil, "I am."

It was not easy to write that personal. In the first place, to describe myself was odious: and to say bluntly in so many words that I wanted to meet a man of such and such qualifications, "object, matrimony," was like holding up one's naked soul to ridicule.

Laboriously I would compose a sentence, write it—and then rub it out; or change the phrasing here and there; scratch out an adjective for which I had searched long and insert another similar, but with perhaps a shade of difference in meaning. I can see myself now on that rainy Sunday afternoon (for long before I finished, it was afternoon; unnoticed came and went the dinner hour) writing, altering, pondering, hoping, despairing.

But at last the thing was done. In a hand that I endeavored to disguise I copied it; and sat there looking at it and thinking of the morrow when I must take it to the office of the newspaper.

So absorbed was I in meditation, that a knock upon the door startled me and, before I could collect my far-roving thoughts, the knock was repeated; hurriedly catching up from the cozy corner couch an afghan, I threw it over the littered table and went to the door. I tried to undo the door noiselessly: the very fact that it was locked seemed evidence against me. What had I been doing that I must lock the door?

But the woman in the hall was so taken up with the sense of the unusual in her own appearance unannounced, that she remarked no agitation in myself.

"I told the maid," she began apologetically, "that you were not expecting me and that I preferred to send up my name. But she insisted that you were at home and that it was all right for me to come upstairs."

"She's a new maid," said I, "and doesn't know my ways. Neither does she like the exercise of climbing stairs. But it's all right, indeed it is," I reassured her, drawing her into the room, "and I'm very glad to see you—if you'll excuse the looks of things."

My caller was Mrs. Wells, a widow a little over forty, who in the last year had been obliged to enter on a life of self-support; after unsuccessful efforts to find employment in small places, she had come to New York six months ago. It was then I met her, when she registered in the employment bureau which our society maintained. She and I had been drawn to each other from the start and, after we placed her as governess uptown, she called several times to see me, both in the office and at my boarding place. But all through the spring I could not rouse myself sufficiently to call on any one.

But to-day I was genuinely glad to see Mrs. Wells. I much admired the bravery with which she had met reverses and adjusted herself to a new way of life; there was always, every time we met, something restful to my fevered spirit in her placidity. And yet to-day it was not her placidity that impressed me most: it was her longing for her children, the suffering that separation from them caused. There were two children: a boy and a girl, and they were at school in the Middle West. "Whatever happens, they must have an education," she declared.

I had been touched before by what she told me of them: to-day she brought their photographs. As we looked at them—a sturdy boy of twelve and a dear girl of ten—and she told me of her hopes and fears, the difference between Mrs. Wells's existence and my own again came home to me. "She lives," I thought. "I only agonize." And I drank in every word she said, envying her even her anxieties.

"But," she said at length, "I mustn't run on like this. What have you been doing with yourself all day?"

Then the temptation to confide in Mrs. Wells sprang upon me. I couldn't have told one who knew me well, one who saw me every day, one who would question me. But I had kept things to myself so long, and I was at

heart so frightened by the course I had decided on, that the opportunity to see the situation from another woman's point of view—an older, wiser woman's, too—appealed to me. But the habit of reticence is hard to overcome.

I hesitated; finally, in a voice that trembled, I said: "I've—I've—been writing an advertisement."

Something in my manner or my tone must have struck her, for she turned to me with an expression of alarmed alertness in her eyes. "An advertisement?"

I pointed to the first page of the newspaper. "An advertisement like those—a personal."

"Child," she gasped, "are you crazy?"

"No," said I, "only desperate."

"But, my dear," she sat before me with her hands clasped, her eyes fixed on mine, "you can't do a thing like that."

I threw my head up with a surge of pride. "Yes, I can. I've thought it out."

Mrs. Wells made no reply. She was waiting for me to explain.

Hot words of justification of my attitude, of resentment of her own, leaped to my lips, but something kept me from uttering them. I reminded myself that I had brooded over this so long that I was overwrought; I tried to see things through her eyes. And when I spoke it was with no trace of the irritation I had felt at what she said.

"Of course, it's unconventional—and I *hate* it," my voice broke, and it seemed a long time till I could go on again. "But what am I to do? If you can suggest anything better, I shall thank you with all my heart. I have tried everything I know—and every door is barred to a girl alone. I *must* have something new to think about; there's perhaps one chance in a hundred of finding something worth while there," I pointed to the newspaper, "and I'm going to risk it, for I've got to the end of my rope."

I paused to give Mrs. Wells an opportunity to speak, but she sat silent, wide-eyed, watching me.

"You are horrified at the idea of my publishing a personal." I leaned toward her in an intense effort at full expression. "Of course you are: how should it be otherwise? Your life flowed easily and naturally in conventional channels. You married young and had long years of happiness; though you are widowed now, nothing can rob you of the past: you have owned your own, you have your memories. And you have your children, too. Can you imagine what it would be like never to have anything a woman craves? I've never had a home since I was old enough to understand the meaning of the word. The men I have met are very few, and nobody I liked liked me—in the right way. All my life I've been alone, and the one hope that has kept me up through every disappointment is—" I threw out my hands—"is gone now."

Tears lay very near the surface, but I fought to keep them back. But when I saw that her own eyes were wet, when she put her arms around me and tried to comfort me, sympathy broke down my self-control.

When I could speak again I told her—told her of Alison, beginning with the yearning for my sister from the first day I understood what it meant that Dr. and Mrs. Coles had adopted her till her answer to my letter came a few months ago; told her of my lonely childhood at grandfather's, of the hunger for affection strengthening with the years of Aunt Jane, and my pawning the watch and starting out for college; of the college days and my idealizing Philip—how at the time I thought it was a sin; of going away from Manchester in order to leave the coast clear for Alison, and at nineteen fixing on New York as a Mecca for wanderers.

I told her, too, of Paul Forsythe and of Mr. Vilmerding. Indeed, I had the feeling that I was pleading my own case before this woman, who was judge and jury

both. I liked her and couldn't bear to have her misunderstand the motive for the daring deed I was determined on. Furthermore, I felt she was my only friend: but that unless I told her the whole truth she, whose own life had been so different, would not understand. And so it was that I spared her—and myself—no detail of the long years.

"It all comes to the same thing," I said at last. "What I wanted I could not get—ever—anywhere."

As we sat together, Mrs. Wells and I, the room had darkened in the rainy twilight; and now the twilight deepened into night. Outside, the rain was falling faster than before; we could hear its rhythmic patter on the tin roof of the extension. But the room was very still.

I rose, stumbled against a hassock, fumbled for the matches, and lighted the gas. Mrs. Wells walked rapidly to where I stood, took my face between her hands, and kissed me.

"Any comfort you can find belongs to you," she said. "Whatever you think best to do, I'll help you all I can."

"Thank you," I replied.

"But I'm afraid," she hesitated a little. "I'm *afraid* you won't find any one who looks on that," indicating the personal column, "as you do."

"Certainly I never shall unless I try," was my rejoinder. "But why should we assume that I'm the only decent-minded individual who has read that page to-day? That all the rest are swindlers and adventurers? My situation is unfortunate, but I don't believe it is unique. Naturally one can't collect statistics about such a thing. But there must be people in the world like me, who are cut off from the ordinary avenues of communication and try this method of securing a new interest. If I could meet a decent man whose mentality I liked, the acquaintance at this crisis in my life would be a godsend, whether a bishop introduced us in the shadow of a church, or

whether we met *there.*" Again I indicated the "personal" column of the newspaper. But I needn't have singled it out—the whole room seemed to be full of it. "The thing itself is right enough. It's the idea of evil people read into it that makes me sick at heart. However, that's part of the price I have to pay. And the price I pay is measured by my need."

The relief of opening my heart to Mrs. Wells, the novelty of sympathy, the assurance that she would help, all put new life into me. The external aspect of the situation had vanished for us both: only the essence really concerned us now, I thought. And yet Mrs. Wells's next remark had to do with unpleasant realities.

"Just how do you propose to do it, may I ask?"

I handed her a sheet of paper. "I have written this," I said, assuming an air as matter-of-fact as possible. "To-morrow morning I shall take it to the office of the newspaper. I suppose it will be like any other advertisement; that is, when I pay the money, they will give me a ticket entitling me to receive the answers—if there are any—to the advertisement. Of course, they'll give the thing a number or a letter or something to distinguish it from all the rest."

Mrs. Wells had been reading it. "They won't need to," she said as she gave it back to me. "I don't believe they ever had one like it."

"What makes you think so? Did you ever read a personal before?"

"No," she admitted; and despite the gravity of the moment we both smiled.

"Well, then," I retorted, as lightly as I could, "you really don't know anything about it." But the situation was too serious for make-believe; solemnly I faced her. "No more do I know what is before me. But I know what is behind. And that gives me courage."

"There's one thing I insist upon," said Mrs. Wells, after a long pause. "Promise me you'll do just as I say

in this." She laid her hand on mine that was clenched upon the table.

"I will if I can," said I. "You know how I appreciate your kindness and sympathy."

"Then prove it by letting me attend to that personal. I'm not going to have you—a young girl like you—carrying it to the office of the newspaper yourself."

"But I'm not a young girl. I'm twenty-seven years old. And I shall wear a veil—a thick veil."

"No, you're not going there," she announced with quiet authority.

"Do you think I'd let you go in my place?" I burst out hotly. "It's dear of you to wish to spare me, but I'll take my own medicine. I refuse to sacrifice a friend."

"There is no question of sacrifice," she said. "I'm not telling you how it will be done, nor who is going to do it."

I shot a glance at her.

"Oh, never fear. The advertisement shall be inserted; and without your identity being known by any one. And I'll bring you the ticket myself. I'm older and more worldly wise than you. But you're to ask no questions. Remember the fairy godmother. She can accomplish miracles when mortals are obedient, but her wrath is terrible."

I still held the paper in my hand and glanced wonderingly from it to her.

"Don't you trust me?" smiled Mrs. Wells.

"Yes."

"Then give me the advertisement and some money, and be done with it."

"How much money?"

"I haven't the least idea what it will cost. Suppose you give me a five dollar bill, and if it's more or less we can make it right afterward. I'll bring you the ticket to-morrow evening, and I can tell you then whether I can

bring the answers to you, too, after the advertisement is published. I suspect," she paused a little, "that we'll be in the country by next week. Mrs. Gates" (the woman by whom she was employed as governess) "said she thought we'd get away the last of this week. In that case," she looked at me very thoughtfully, "this is what you do, say the Saturday afternoon after this is published. Go to a telegraph office near the —— Building, and engage a responsible messenger; give him the envelope containing the ticket and he will bring you the replies. Under no circumstances are you yourself to set foot inside the office of the newspaper."

"But why," I asked, "can't I hire a messenger to present the advertisement in the first place?"

"Didn't I say you were to ask no questions? All you have to do is to obey. Remember the fairy godmother."

"Well," I drew a long breath of relief and gratitude as I handed her the paper and a five dollar bill, "you've lifted a millstone from my neck. I don't know how to thank you."

"I don't want any thanks," she said. "I want an Amsterdam Avenue car as soon as I can get it. Good-by and good luck, my dear. You deserve a better fate than this." And tucking the advertisement and the money in her pocket-book, she left me with the feeling that I had had a visit from a fairy godmother indeed.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE ANSWERS "MARGARET" RECEIVED

MRS. WELLS was as good as her word. Monday evening she brought me a ticket which entitled me, on presenting it, to receive the answers to the advertisement signed "Margaret"—the name I had assumed—in the New York —— Sunday issue of June —.

When the day came I secured the paper early, and turned to the personal column, my heart beating fast. There it was, "Margaret's" advertisement, half way down the page. With blazing cheeks I read it, then took up another section of the newspaper. But every page, every paragraph, seemed to wear a conscious air. I couldn't bear the sight of any of that newspaper, so I tucked it all in a bureau drawer and tried to forget that it was there.

My own newspaper—which did not publish personals—I read twice through, as if to atone for my lapse from loyalty. Now that the thing was done, now that I had published a personal and had hidden in a bureau drawer the paper that contained it, I was determined to ignore the incident. And, fortunately, Mrs. Wells understood my feeling and ignored it, too; she was not the kind of woman to make one repent a confidence. On bringing me the ticket she had said: "You were a good girl. You didn't ask any questions. And I sha'n't ask any, either. But anything you tell me will be safe with me."

It turned out that I went myself for the answers to the advertisement, following Mrs. Wells's advice in all particulars. I shall never forget my feeling as, closely

veiled and very nervous, I walked into a telegraph office and asked for "a reliable messenger."

"That's the only kind we have," snarled the man at the desk.

"Well"—I was very red and flustered underneath my veil, and anxious, too, to mollify the man—"I only mean that I don't want a small boy."

He turned to a row of messengers at the other end of the room and signaled one of them, who may have been seventeen years old. The youth eyed me with frank curiosity as I disclosed the errand. "I'll wait for you here," I said with all the dignity I could command. "Please be quick."

He set out at once, and I prepared to occupy myself doing nothing until his return. But I felt ill at ease; and conspicuous as well, doing nothing there in broad daylight, with doors and windows open wide and the crowd surging up and down Broadway.

I sat on the edge of my chair, listened to the clanging of the cable cars outside and the clicking of the wires indoors, watched the clock and pulled my veil down closer. As time went on, I wondered if the boy had run away—or met with an accident—or given the letters to the police? A thousand terrifying possibilities rushed pellmell through my mind. In imagination I saw myself arrested and taken before the sergeant—in newspapers I had read of "the sergeant at the desk"—who was commanding me to tell my name and where I lived.

"But I won't tell him, I *won't*," I repeated to myself. And the dots and dashes that the operator, just across the aisle, was clicking off at intervals, echoed my denial with fitful emphasis.

The thought came over me, "What if somebody I know should happen to come in?" I knew very few people in New York, but I had always believed that, if there were one individual on earth whom one didn't wish to see, that individual would appear at the most incon-

venient time. I glanced apprehensively toward the door: there was nobody there—yet. I wished I could sink through the floor.

At last I heard the shuffling sound of feet, and looked up to see the shambling figure of the seventeen-year-old boy making his way to me. I rose and took a step or two to meet him. He carried two large packages of letters tied together by a string: and as he handed them to me, he grinned.

Then removing his cap he took from it a book, stuck out a pencil, and pointed to a place for me to write. What I wrote I do not know, save that it was not my name: all I remember distinctly after the boy's return was his grin as he handed me the letters.

As I started for the door, I wrapped the letters in an afternoon newspaper I had brought with me. The bundle felt as heavy as lead, and I was weak and faint. But with that terrible feeling that there was some one in pursuit, I hurried to the nearest Elevated station and went home. It was Saturday afternoon, and I had left the office earlier than usual.

When I reached the house I opened the door of my own room cautiously, as if I feared an enemy would spring out at me; but of course nobody was there. I stepped inside, looked around despairingly, held out the letters at arm's length, and then let them fall. Their dull thud, as they struck the floor, seemed the death-knell of my hopes. And I burst into tears.

In vain I told myself as I endeavored to reason away my grief that it was weak and silly to be so upset: I had known beforehand that such an unconventional step would involve distress. "But a drowning man does not mind the discomfort of being wet," I said. "Neither should I be disturbed by appearances. I have done no wrong. This is my last resort. If it fails——"

But I dared not pursue this train of thought; instead, by and by, I picked up the letters. There were upward

of fifty in the two packages and before opening a single one I sorted them into two piles, classing them from surface indications on the envelopes as "Possible" or "Impossible." When I had run them through in this way—with all but half a dozen in the second pile—I began gingerly to open them and read.

There was one letter I never shall forget; simply from the appearance of the envelope I had placed it in the pile of the "Impossible." Yet I believe that the sincerity of the man who wrote it was equal to my own.

He said in effect that he was poor, and that in early life he had been denied the advantages of an education; that he worked in a machine shop now, but had been attending night school for two winters past. Aside from this, he was working on a patent; and he knew, he said, that he could bring it to perfection, could win fame and money, too, if—if he only had some one who believed in him! If he could have some good woman's sympathy, perhaps in time her affection—which he would try to deserve, he said—it would change the world for him. But he was all alone.

The paper on which this was written was cheap, and it was not overclean; the words were not all spelled right; the attempts at punctuation were pathetic; the handwriting was cramped, like that of a child. To compose the letter had evidently been a work of time and effort. He said he had read my personal every day since Sunday, and he asked if I would write to him. The envelope bore the postmark of the day before.

It is easy enough for cynics to sneer at such a story: just as it is easy enough for them to sneer at mine. But as I read that poor, blotted, misspelled scrawl, I could see the man who wrote it; and I believed every word he said. At least I believed that he believed it all. I understood his need, my heart ached for him and for all desolate creatures like him and like myself. But—God forgive me for a coward—I couldn't write to him.

It is needless to linger long on those letters as a whole: some of the writers took a flippant tone, others were plainly curious, others frank in the extreme. Several men admitted they were married, but "trusted that would be no bar to our meeting," three of them, I remember, said their wives would be away all summer. There were communications from other places than New York; some from Canada. To my surprise there were letters ostensibly from women who declared they were looking for a congenial woman friend and thought, from the tone of my personal, that a meeting might be advantageous to us both. What that meant I never knew.

Gradually the half dozen letters which at first sight of the envelopes I had laid aside as "possible," dwindled down to one. But that one I liked very much.

It was written on the thin, gray paper one sees so much abroad: the handwriting was small and fine and had much individuality. There was scarcely an "i" dotted or a "t" crossed in the whole of the three and a half closely written pages, but it was very legible.

After saying at the start that to describe himself was "like a tug o' war between self-conceit and modesty, with the odds on self-conceit," the writer admitted that, as it was the only means at his disposal, he would better plunge in at once and have it over with. Accordingly, without statistics, without anything so crude as weight and height and age, without even telling me the color of his eyes, he pictured for me a most attractive man.

But more than what he said, the way he said it appealed to me. He told me he was a Harvard graduate; that he had studied at Johns Hopkins, too, and took his Ph.D. in Germany; that he was an expert chemist, and had lived much abroad. Indeed, his letter abounded in references to Germany and his studies there.

Coming back to America, he gave me to understand that he had inherited a little property from his mother, whose name was "Margaret." "Indeed, it was the

name that first attracted me to your personal," he said. "And then when I had read it, I was glad that you were Margaret."

He went on to tell me that he was alone.

"I haven't minded it so very much till lately, I've been so taken up with work. But life is something more than work, after all, and if I could find the right kind of girl for a friend, it would mean a lot to me. And I would try to make it mean a lot to her. The world is full of girls, of course; but sixteen yards of blue muslin and a hand-painted fan (with a face to match) don't interest me much. Someway I imagine you are different. I suppose I am selfish: all men are, I have been told. But if you'll only be unselfish enough to answer this, I'll try to convince you that I have a few good qualities.

"Yours sincerely,
"WILLIAM B. ELLERY,
"General Delivery,
"New York City."

The idea of sending a letter to the General Delivery was not agreeable. But I remembered that, like myself, this man was running a risk. It was not for me to raise objections now.

The next day—it was again Sunday—I wrote to him, and Monday morning on my way downtown engaged a private letter box in a stationery shop, as I had planned to do. The ordeal was not so terrible as I had imagined it would be. After the messenger's grin in the telegraph office Saturday afternoon, I fancy almost anything would have seemed insignificant by comparison. And truly, by the matter-of-factness of the girl in the stationery shop, I might have been purchasing Spencerian copy-books.

Having rented the letter box, I tripped out hurriedly and in a drug store near by, where there was a substation of the post office, I borrowed a pen and added the address.

I was still "Margaret," but I took a surname now.

For a month the correspondence continued almost daily without my ever seeing him. In an early letter he inquired "if it would be possible for us to meet." But I said, "Not yet." And he acquiesced, assuring me that he was mine to command whenever I saw fit.

Much as I disliked sending letters to the General Delivery, I wanted to be sure in my own mind before meeting him that he would not misunderstand the kind of girl I was. After my experience, I was disposed to be fearful of all men; then, too, the charm of the correspondence was increasing all the time, and I was in no haste to break the spell. I knew that he was on his mettle now: it might be different after we had met.

Early in the correspondence I discovered that he, too, was an enthusiast of the newspaper I had read ever since my sophomore year in college; after that we compared notes on the "yarns" and discussed the editorials; his humorous references to politics and his running commentary on city and national events were full of interest.

Some of the letters I received were mailed in Brooklyn, others in Jersey City, still others in New York. None of them gave an address; few were ever dated; or if dated it would be in some such way as this: "the third—or tenth—or thirtieth" or "some time in the Spring." But for the most part there was no attempt; he said he preferred to take no chances about hitting the date right, but would put the responsibility up to the postmark. "It's the only way I have of getting anything out of the government," he explained.

Once he wrote that he and his fountain pen were occupying "one of those foolish chairs at the street corner. In other words, I'm having my shoes shined. Two dagoes are vieing with each other to see which can get through first, so you won't mind if the writing is queerer and crookeder than ever, will you? I've got to catch a train." Sometimes the letters would be long;

again on half a sheet of paper the man would say: "I'm up to my ears in work. Will you pardon a note?"

But no matter how brief the letter, it always contained something worth remembering, something said as no one else would say it, some characteristic turn of phrase, some whimsicality buried in the queer handwriting where the "i" was never dotted and the "t" was never crossed.

Soon I was measuring time by the arrival of those thin, foreign-looking envelopes that brought always, whence I did not know, the atmosphere of charm, and, as well, the air of mystery which, they say, we women like.

CHAPTER XLV

"WILLIAM B. ELLERY, GENERAL DELIVERY"

BUT by and by, weary of the subterfuge of the private letter box, weary of the General Delivery, I was ready to unmask. I was convinced that he would not misunderstand me. In one letter I told him so, gave him my name and address, and added that, if he cared to call the following Thursday evening, I should be glad to see him.

He replied that it was his misfortune to be obliged to go out of town on Thursday; but if the invitation held over till Saturday evening, he would gladly avail himself of it. Would I please send him word to the General Delivery, New York, not later than Saturday forenoon? And he tucked on this postscript: "When I see you, I'll explain."

I liked the look of that: it seemed to indicate that he appreciated my feeling about the General Delivery. In reality, I told myself—to forestall possible disappointment later on—I knew nothing of him save that he wrote the most delightful letters I had ever read. I wondered if he would send up his card Saturday evening with his real name on it? Or had he told me his real name at first? For an instant I regretted that I had not said something on that point.

But it was a point so delicate! How could I refer to it? Surely a man with so much discernment didn't need a hint. In his heart he must abhor disguise just as much as I. Then I reread the postscript: "When I see you I'll

explain." Of course it would be all right; and, examining the letter in my hand, I wondered for the hundredth time how he made those funny little curlicues on his capitals.

Indeed, I wondered about many things: everywhere, at the office, in the street, in the Elevated train, in my room, I was turning matters over in my mind. If Mrs. Wells had been at hand, I should doubtless have conferred with her. But the family by whom she was employed as governess had left the city weeks before, and she was with them.

It was now two days before Saturday; and I was afraid. I began to distrust the evidence of the letters themselves. How did I know that the man who signed them had written them? He had copied them, of course; the handwriting was at all times the same. But I had no guarantee that the composition was his own, or that he was telling me the truth.

It might be a put-up-job on the part of several young men who were looking for amusement, and were passing my replies, as they had passed the personal at first, from hand to hand. Or it might well be that some poor, ignorant fellow, or some criminal, perhaps, had found another man, who was never to appear, to write the letters for him. Some ghastly surprise might be in store for me on Saturday.

Perhaps this matter of the letters was a deep-laid plan of the police. I had heard that spasmodically efforts were made to suppress personal advertisements; and it might be that I, who never in my life before had defied any of the conventions of society, who had entered on this step only after long consideration, I, whose motive was as honest as the day, was to pay the penalty. I understood that at times the police had a passion for arresting somebody, anybody, to satisfy public sentiment. There must be some scapegoat. Might it not be I? My imagination even pictured the headlines in the news-

papers, "Settlement Worker a Fraud! In League with Criminals! Charity only a Cloak!" And I surmised that certain persons in the boarding house from whom I had held aloof would rejoice in my downfall.

In imagination I endured all the humiliation of disgrace. I have read of the contrition that the guilty feel. I wonder does it far surpass the repentance of the innocent? No words can tell how I wanted to believe in "William B. Ellery." His letters had come to mean so much to me: I needed them so sorely that I couldn't escape the fear that just because I needed them I couldn't have them; that they were not genuine.

What then was my emotion, on that Saturday evening, when I was looking forward to my first glimpse of the man who sent the letters? I cannot describe it: I can only say that every thought I had was in very truth a prayer.

My room—as has been told before—was large and fitted up as a sitting-room. The landlady herself had pointed out its attractiveness as a place to entertain my friends: girls from the settlement had been there, and at various times different people—married couples and single women—from the boarding house. But this was the first time I expected a young man. "Young?" I didn't even know that he was young: I knew that he—or somebody—wrote charming letters. Beyond that I was at sea.

I wore my business suit down to dinner Saturday, because I was afraid that if I appeared in the new gown that had just come home it would excite remark; some one at the table would be sure to ask what I was so dressed up for? Was I expecting company?

"But what would they say," ran an undercurrent through my mind, "if they knew that a man whom I have never seen, to whom I've never been introduced, is coming to call on me?" At this thought, as I rose to leave the room, I blushed deeper than before.

"Somebody's lookin' pretty fine to-night," commented the young man who sat opposite me.

"Well, she isn't looking at *you*, at any rate," snapped out the middle-aged woman at the foot of the table. And I heard her say, as I started up the stairs: "If that girl ever takes up with anybody, it'll be a *gentleman*."

"*Is* he going to be a gentleman?" I thought, "or is he going to be a thug? I shall find out pretty soon."

Excitedly I put on my new gown; then scrutinized the reflection in the looking-glass. Even my solicitude could find no flaw in the dressmaker's work; and I decided this was the prettiest, the most becoming gown, that I had ever had. Then I sat down to wait.

I had no idea what time to look for Mr. Ellery; and every time the door-bell rang I started, and listened for the servant's step out in the hall. I heard it frequently as he went to carry messages to others; but he didn't come to my room till he brought the ice water. It was then twenty minutes after eight.

Although it was midsummer, we were just then having disagreeable, cold weather. People in the mountains were shivering, so the papers said, and even in New York at night blankets were acceptable. When I fastened a blind that had been flapping disconsolately in the wind, I noticed that it had come on to rain: a cold, drizzling rain. From every sign outside it might have been a night in March.

I tried to read, but the words danced up and down and I couldn't follow them, so I shut my eyes and began to count up to one hundred. But it went very slowly, for I kept thinking, "What if he shouldn't come at all?" Twice I opened my eyes to see what time it was; then, with a sigh, started in to count again.

By and by the door-bell rang once more, a loud, clear ring; and presently I heard somebody coming up the stairs; then there was a tapping at my door.

I made myself go very slowly to answer it. Samuel,

the servant, stood there; and he said, "Mr. Ellery is here to see you."

Oh, how keenly, but also guardedly, I looked at Samuel to see if his manner betrayed any trace of amazement at my visitor, any sense of the grotesque in the appearance of the man downstairs. The servant seemed to have a tremendous advantage over me; and in the instant that he stood there, my eyes searched him through and through. But Samuel's manner and his tone were the same as usual.

"Bring Mr. Ellery upstairs," I said. "He doesn't know the way."

It wasn't long till Samuel stood there again; and this time he was not alone. I had heard the two of them coming through the hall. When the knock sounded, I drew a long breath and, trembling, started for the door; opening it, I heard Samuel murmur, "Mr. Ellery," before he turned to go. Then I took one look at the man before me—and felt as if I had been dragged back from the edge of a precipice.

Sooner than it takes to tell it, I had shaken hands with him and was ushering him into the room; he dropped into a large armchair beside the reading-table as naturally as if he had done it all his life. But he was very grave.

I took a rocking-chair opposite and shoved across the table an ash-tray: I had bought it the day before. "Don't you want to smoke?" I asked suddenly, and we both laughed. In one of his letters he had told me that he was never good-natured after dinner till he had had a smoke.

I glanced over at the mantelpiece where a small gilt clock was ticking out importantly that it was after nine. "I'm quite sure," said I, "that you haven't had time since dinner even for a cigarette."

"I know I'm late," he said, his glance following mine. "I didn't get back from Philadelphia till seven

o'clock. And I haven't had a smoke since I left the train." Then, with a slight gesture of acknowledgment, he brought out a cigar-case. I noticed that it was marked, "W. B. E." This discovery struck me as significant, but, in an effort to ignore it, I said something trivial, I have forgotten what; with deliberation, the man picked out a cigar and, biting off its end, held a match ready to strike, as if awaiting my next remark.

I referred to something he had written me concerning the work that took him to Philadelphia; as he smoked, he told me more of it, though without mentioning names or definite localities. Meantime, while I followed every word he said, I was furtively observing him.

No one would have called him handsome. But he was something better: he looked interesting. And I felt as much at home with him as if he had been one of the boys whom I had known in college; grown older now, of course, but not old enough so that there was any explanation except prematureness for the gray hair on his left temple. His eyes, too, were gray, and I marked the tired droop of the lids. The long thin hand holding the cigar was muscular.

When he spoke, as he did between meditative puffs at his cigar, the low, almost drawling voice was restful to me; and I liked what he said. When he listened, it was with that air of grave attention that seems like homage to a girl. But most of all the impression he conveyed was of one tired and overworked; and I felt sorry for him.

The conversation went on easily, uninterruptedly; the manner of our learning of each other we ignored. Why refer to it when there was so much else to say? In the long correspondence—a month, with letters every day or so—we had found out much about each other's tastes. And now we were like old friends who, after long separation, had met again and were comparing notes on what had most interested us in the interval.

At twenty minutes after ten, he rose to go. As he shook hands with me he said, "You're an outdoors girl, aren't you?"

"As much as I can be, tied up in an office all day long," I laughed. "But I exercise a lot."

"I wonder why all women don't," he mused; then chuckling feebly, "or for the matter of that, all men."

"Speak for yourself," said I.

"Well, I used to," he insisted. "I thought I was an athlete when I was in college. So did other folks. They gave me foolish prizes—cups, you know, engraved—things I could never sell." Then he smiled. "How far can you walk?"

"I should like to walk—in cold weather, you understand—most of the way down to the office in the morning and back again at night. But there isn't time. However, I usually manage to get in about five miles."

"That's the way to talk," said he. "If more women would get out and walk, they wouldn't be complaining of their symptoms all the time. I might as well tell you that I haven't a very high opinion of your sex. Most of the women I have known were lazy—and unintelligent at the same time. As if either wasn't bad enough!" There was a pause; and when he spoke again it was wistfully. "It's cool and green in Central Park, isn't it? Will you take a walk with me to-morrow there?"

"With pleasure," I exclaimed. "What time?"

Ruefully he shook his head and smiled. "You see, I don't know what time I'll wake up. If I'm in luck, I'll sleep till noon. I'm so dead tired I wouldn't have gone anywhere to-night but here." He sighed a little. "Does it matter very much about the time?"

"No," said I. "I shall be at home all day."

Then he went away, without any reference to the postscript that had said, "When I see you I'll explain."

It troubled me when I was alone. But the tired

droop of the lids over his gray eyes came back to me. I remembered, too, the slight stoop of the shoulders, the discouraged air—and his wistfulness.

"It doesn't matter after all," I thought. "He's a tired boy and I'm going to trust him. By and by he will explain."

CHAPTER XLVI

A SUNDAY IN CENTRAL PARK

TO my surprise, next morning he was announced at half past ten. He waited for me in the parlor and when I walked in, buttoning my gloves, he looked up with a start, then said: "I didn't suppose you'd be ready yet awhile, so I brought a book to read."

I burst into a laugh. "Oh, of course, if you prefer to read"—a gesture indicated my willingness to efface myself.

But he tucked the volume—it was a limp little book—into his pocket, took out his watch, glanced at it with a "Pardon me," and put it back. Then he turned confidentially to me. "I just wanted to be sure. I haven't been in the house six minutes yet. I see I shall have to reconstruct my ideas of girls."

With that we set out for Central Park. It was a beautiful morning, with fine, bracing air. In broad daylight the harassed expression of his face was very noticeable; and yet he was a young man, not much more than thirty, I was sure. But on his shoulders seemed to rest the burdens of the world.

It pleased me to observe that the burdens lifted as the morning passed. We walked and talked at ease; now covering long stretches of the Park with which I judged he was not familiar; now pausing to feed the squirrels, for I had some nuts in the pocket of my coat. All around us nature wore her most attractive garb; above us bent a sky serene. July to-day was May, as last night had been like March.

Later on we found a shady nook near the upper end of Central Park and sat down to rest; then he brought out the little book he had been reading when I came downstairs, and I saw that it was "Shakespeare's England." He told me of the places mentioned—especially of Stratford, which he knew best of all—and read to me bits of description that he liked, and talked of many things, evincing always appreciation of what was fine and beautiful.

By and by he smoked, and I read to him. But there were many interruptions: one or the other of us would comment on something in the text and that would lead us far. But the journey was worth taking, for it yielded treasures of understanding and sympathy.

And yet the talk was almost always far away and impersonal. There was in this man no questioning, no endeavor to hunt up acquaintances in common, no attempt to designate in his own case, or to search out in mine, chapter and verse in any volume of experience.

This to me was not wholly satisfactory: my life was like an open book and I was a little chagrined perhaps that he showed no curiosity concerning it. That he liked me as I was to-day, I understood; but that he cared nothing for my yesterdays, seemed strange.

For my part I wanted to know all about him from the day that he was born: especially was I eager for information as to how he lived and where, and just what his business was. "Expert chemist" was too vague a term to satisfy my mind. By whom was he employed when he went so frequently from town? But he didn't tell me and I couldn't bring myself to ask. He had said in his first letter that he was alone: on that I built my faith.

On that and on the impression created by his letters and—now that I had seen him—by his personality. Without knowing why, I felt sorry for him. And sympathy held in abeyance for the most part to-day, as it

had done last evening, uneasiness on my own account concerning the mystery that enshrouded him. As for his manner to me, if I had been a saint from heaven he couldn't have shown me more respect; and there was at times a wistfulness about him that appealed to the mother side of me. When all was said and done, he was a tired boy, and I wanted to comfort him.

And so I forgot myself and tried to drive away the serious expression from his face; tried to make him laugh and felt well repaid when, at the close of some recital that I had made as amusing as I could, he said: "Do you know, I feel like another man?"

But he certainly had the appearance of a child—a child who was rather pleased with himself, too—when, from underneath his light overcoat that lay near us on the grass, he produced a pasteboard box and proceeded very slowly to unwrap the covering. I had noticed the box the first thing when I greeted him in the parlor of the boarding house, but I didn't say a word. So now in silence I regarded him.

"I've been waiting all the morning," he remarked, as he fumbled with the string, "for you to ask me what was in this box."

Now it was my turn to be pleased with myself; and I know I showed it as I said, "Oh, I'm no relation to Bluebeard's Wife."

"I still think you would ask me if I gave you time enough," was the reply. "But it isn't worth while." And he laughed. "I'm too hungry myself."

Then he removed the cover from the box, took out a couple of Japanese napkins, and spread one of them on my lap. Passing the box to me, he said, "I hope you'll like the stuff."

I looked inside, and saw sandwiches of various kinds, pickles, hard-boiled eggs, salted almonds, and a large supply of fruit; there was also a bottle of coffee, a paper of salt and pepper, and some sugar, too.

"How perfectly lovely," I exclaimed. "I never supposed a man would think of anything like that." It was on the tip of my tongue to say, "Where did you get it? Who put it up for you?" But I refrained.

"I've done considerable camping in my time," he said, as if the completeness of the preparations called for an explanation of some kind.

But no other explanation did he vouchsafe concerning anything; and I made up my mind to ignore all except the here and now. In high glee we ate the luncheon, dividing the food punctiliously into two equal shares. And there wasn't a crumb left. Then he smoked again, and told me of picnicking in Germany, "with half a dozen nationalities represented in the bunch"; of mountain climbing in Switzerland, "with a queer chap, a Russian, who was exiled from his country"; of fishing trips to the Banks of Newfoundland. He talked easily and well; in fact, nothing was left unsaid save what I wanted most of all to hear.

By and by, late in the afternoon, we wandered back to the boarding house in West Seventy —— Street. As we lingered at the door he said, "This has been fine. May I see you again—soon?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to come over Wednesday evening," he continued wistfully.

I gave him my hand for good-by.

"Until Wednesday, then," I said.

Monday evening when I reached home from the office I found a letter from him, postmarked, "Brooklyn." At the top of the first page he had written, "Sunday evening." And this was the beginning:

"I feel that I have known you always and yet, as most people measure time, it is only twenty-four hours since we met. How do you account for it?"

Then he referred to our conversation Saturday evening, and reviewed our day together in the Park. After that he said:

"May I speak frankly and will you forgive me if it seems precipitate? You are the one girl in the world that I want for a friend; the kind of friend that counts, that helps a man to do his best. My life is lonely—and hard. I work early and late, sometimes in New York, oftener out of town; it's only once or possibly twice a week that I could go to see you at the most; and perhaps I should be too tired to talk then. But just to sit and smoke quietly in that cool, high-ceilinged room of yours, just to know that you were there and that you understood I'd rather be with you than anywhere else on earth —that is what I want.

"And may I call you 'Dorothy'? I'm sorry you're not 'Margaret,' for as I told you, that was my mother's name. She died when I was a little chap; and I have always worshiped her memory. But I like 'Dorothy' next best. Or is it that I should like any name that belonged to you? But you're not 'Miss Baldwin' to me. You're 'Dorothy,' and I want to call you that.

"I know I'm asking a great deal. And I have nothing to give you in return—at present—except gratitude.

"Wednesday evening I'm going to bring you a book of Stevenson's; there's a short story that I want to read to you. Unless, after you have read this letter, you tell me not to come. But please don't.

"BILLY."

CHAPTER XLVII

A VISIT TO THE COLUMBIA LIBRARY

THAT was the way it began; and it continued outwardly the same for upward of two months. The evenings that he spent with me, the Sundays that we visited the Park, were perfect; and the letters that he sent me at frequent intervals were always full of charm. But when I was alone again, from the moment that he stepped outside my door till he reappeared, I brooded on the mystery. I used to think sometimes that perhaps when he was very young he had committed some crime, had done something of which he was ashamed—something he was trying to live down. And that I could help him only by keeping still. And so, though his silence hurt me more and more, I kept waiting all the time for him to speak.

One day the landlady asked me where he lived. "Brooklyn," said I, remembering that most of his letters were mailed there.

"What section of Brooklyn?" she persisted. "I lived in Flatbush once."

"Oh, I don't know anything about Brooklyn," I replied and made good my escape. But after that I was in terror lest she should waylay him in the hall and question him.

There were usually other people present when I paid my board; but it happened once that, on my weekly visit to the landlady, I found her at her desk alone. "That fellow of yours keeps a-calling pretty regular," she com-

mented, smiling and folding away the money I had given her. "It looks serious."

As a rule people rarely ventured on personal remarks with me. But the landlady was privileged. She was elderly and lame; and I knew she had my good at heart. "Goin' to lose you, am I?" she inquired, laying her hand caressingly on my shoulder.

I blushed; and then, furious with myself for it, only blushed the more as I replied, "Not the least danger in the world."

"Well, I'm not so sure of that," and she shook her head. "I have heard girls talk before. I should miss you, but I'd be glad to see you married if you was goin' to do well. And I'll bet that fellow is as smart as a steel trap. I hope he's a professor?"

"No," said I. "He's a chemist."

"Oh, I meant a professin' Christian," said the landlady.

There was no further questioning from her, but I felt that she was watching me and was hoping for the best; and the other people in the house were curious more or less. It was probably the fact of my having a reputation in the house for being "very particular" about young men that gave zest to the gossip now. I have no reason to believe that there was anything especially ill-natured in the talk, but I knew that they were talking, listening for the door-bell, and eying, too, the envelopes that, addressed in the same handwriting, were so often waiting for me in the dining-room.

Doubly grateful, then, I was for the privacy of my own sitting-room; for while not a word had been said thus far that the whole world might not have heard, the reading aloud—we read many stories in books and magazines—the sense of homelikeness, and, of course, the man's smoking, would not have been possible in the public reception-room downstairs. And, indeed, I knew how to value present advantages after having been the

object of so much scrutiny at the Mead's when Paul Forsythe was calling on me; and also at Mrs. Miggs's, where the other boarders used to say, with much jocund stretching of the truth, that they never stepped into the parlor without finding there Mr. Prime and me.

But to come back to the present: Billy told me, when he called a certain Thursday evening, that he was going to Pittsburgh the next day on business; that he would be there over Sunday and expected to return on Tuesday.

"In the meantime I shall be too busy even to write a note to you," he said. "Can you see me Tuesday evening?"

"Yes," said I.

After he had gone that evening, I wrote a note and then slipped out and mailed it to a young girl in Arverne, Long Island, inviting her to spend Saturday afternoon, Saturday night, and Sunday with me in New York. She was a girl from up the State who had arrived ten days ago to make her way alone in the metropolis, and at once sought work through the employment bureau which our society maintained. At first sight, I was much interested in her, and a position offering just then in the Long Island town, I was instrumental in securing it for her.

She didn't know how fortunate she was to find anything to do so soon; yet she accepted the position gratefully, she said. But I could see that the child—she wasn't quite nineteen—was disappointed at not being in New York. The glamor of the city was upon her: to be so near and yet so far as Arverne was tantalizing. And I suspected that by this time she was homesick, too; she had never been away from her mother until now, she told me, in the course of our first interview; so I welcomed this opportunity to take her sight-seeing, and also hoped to have a quiet talk with her. But I don't want to make myself out more generous than I was: it is also very true that, quite aside from my interest in the girl, I wanted something to occupy my mind while Billy was away.

Directly her joyous acceptance of my invitation came to hand, I so arranged my work that I could get away on Saturday at noon; I bought theater tickets for the evening, but decided to leave the program of the afternoon to my guest's own choice. Accordingly, as she and I lingered over luncheon at Purssell's on Saturday, I asked her what she wanted most of all to see that afternoon.

The girl's eyes shone. "The Columbia University Library," she said. And she added, in a lower tone, "A friend of mine graduated at Columbia last June. He's out West now."

The dear child! I knew just how she felt and I would have undertaken a pilgrimage to the shrine had it been twenty miles away. There wasn't any Subway then; and it took us a long time to cover the distance to Columbia.

In the rotunda of the library my companion spied a familiar face. "Why, there's one of the girls from home," she cried. It was the season for autumn excursions to New York, and every section of the city was thronged with visitors.

After the two girls had embraced and explained to their mutual satisfaction (and to the manifest annoyance of certain individuals who were tiptoeing around) how they happened to be there, I conducted them upstairs to an alcove that chanced to be unoccupied; and I left them there together that they might chat to their heart's content, telling them that when they wanted me they would find me somewhere down the corridor.

To fill the interim, I began pacing idly up and down, pausing for an instant now and then to read the titles of the volumes near the doorway of the alcoves that I passed. But all of a sudden I came to a dead halt. In front of me were rows on rows of college catalogues, and my eyes had fallen on the "Harvard" group. Of course I thought of Billy—and drew nearer to the shelves.

He had never mentioned his class year, but within

certain limits I could approximate; and I smiled at the idea of telling him, when I saw him next, how I had guessed right about the year he graduated the first time I tried.

With this ambition uppermost, I hesitated among several dry, official-looking documents. I had no thought of spying on him, of ferreting out any mystery: my only impulse was affection for the places he had known; a wish to see his name in black and white; even to discover the name of the dormitory that had sheltered him in the long ago. I remembered my own college days: and hoped his had been happier.

All this and more rushed through my mind as I stood before the shelves. I ran my fingers along the back of several catalogues, debating which to choose for the first try; then I selected one, pulled it out, blew off the dust, opened it, and scanned the roster of the several classes for that academic year. Billy wasn't there.

In order to save time, I next referred to the year book of the Harvard Club. "That would tell the year," I thought. But it didn't tell me anything. However, I reminded myself that not all Harvard graduates were members of the Harvard Club, and turned back to the catalogues. So careful was I not to overlook any possibility of finding him, that I went through the "E's" for the last fifteen years, and searched the lists of special students, too. But it wasn't any use: the name that I was looking for didn't once appear.

I lifted from the shelves the Johns Hopkins' catalogues for the same period. They were musty and covered with dust, and they felt heavier than they were. I laid them on the table in a pile. One by one I examined them: all with the same result. The Billy that I knew was unknown to them.

I sat there fingering the last volume I had looked at; then I laid it down and, as still as death, went over various discrepancies in Billy's verbal accounts of things

that I myself knew about. Heretofore I had covered with the mantle of charity his general vagueness and his inaccuracies—but now I laid them bare. An "expert chemist," he had said. For the first time it came over me that the man of science was above everything exact. I reviewed the things Billy had told me from the start. They were like a column of figures, each one insignificant in itself, perhaps; but when I added them, they gave me a total of doubt. And it was written large. . . .

The voice of my young friend called in the corridor, "Miss Baldwin, Miss Baldwin, where are you?"

I swallowed hard. "Here," I said. Then I rose slowly, gathered up the catalogues, and replaced them on the shelves.

The girl had found me now. She gave a quick glance at my face and exclaimed, "Oh, you're tired! It's a shame to keep you waiting here so long. But," she sighed happily, looking around the Library, "isn't it beautiful?"

For answer I kissed her—and we went away.

CHAPTER XLVIII

"NEXT TIME I'LL TELL HIM"

LATE Sunday afternoon her visit ended. On our way to the Thirty-fourth Street Ferry—I was going with her to Long Island City—she assured me that everything had been perfect. "I shall remember this visit all my life," she said.

We had left the car now and were making for the ferry slip. A boat had just come in and we followed those ahead of us down the passage-way to go on board. And there in the throng of passengers who were hurrying from the boat I ran into Billy: Billy with a traveling bag coming from the train, a Long Island train.

"Why," I gasped, "you told me you were going to be in Pittsburgh."

"Oh—I—at the last minute—I—couldn't get away," he stammered. "It had to be postponed. Will you excuse me, please? I'm in a hurry now. I'll see you Tuesday, as we said." And he was gone before I could reply.

Tuesday evening didn't bring him, but it brought a note. He said he was writing on the ferry-boat—it was mailed in Jersey City—to explain that he was ordered off unexpectedly on the postponed Pittsburgh trip. "I hope to get back by Friday; if not, then Saturday," he said. "I'll send you a letter just as soon as I hit New York, and tell you all about it when we meet. Pray for me, my lady, for this trip means a lot."

There was no word of him on Friday; but, when I went home to dinner Saturday evening, I found a note.

It had been mailed at ten o'clock that morning, and it read like this:

"I shall call this evening, unless you send me word you cannot see me.

"BILLY."

There was no time to send him word, even had I wished; and no place to send it but the General Delivery.

It was a week since the journey to Columbia: for a week I had been thinking what to say. And now as I dressed with one eye on the clock—for it was almost time for him—I rehearsed it all. "It's the only way," I kept saying to myself. "I can't go on like this."

But when the door-bell rang, when I heard him dragging himself upstairs, when at last he stood before me, what I had so carefully thought out was of no avail. I didn't remember a word of it: all I knew was that Billy was ill.

"I'm tied up with rheumatism," he explained; and his face, his every motion showed he spoke the truth. "I had to fuss around in the wet in Pittsburgh. It rained all the time I was there and—worse luck—I didn't take the paint pot with me."

"The paint pot?" I inquired.

"Yes. The doctor told me to use it freely; and I do when the stuff is where I am. But it's generally some place else." Wearily he limped over to a rocking chair. "You see these attacks have a way of coming on unexpectedly. If the sun forgets to get up some morning, or it's damp, or warm, or almost anything, I have to take to paint." Here he shifted uneasily in his chair; his face was drawn with pain.

After awhile he smiled again. "You've no idea how ingenious I've become in tattooing; and I've worked out some very tasteful patterns on the carpet, too. The stuff spills easier than ink." Again he tried to smile,

but failed. "I beg your pardon, Dorothy. I'm not very entertaining. But—I'm all done up."

"Don't try to talk," I said. "You ought not to be here, anyway."

He shot a glance at me.

"I mean the best place for a sick man is at home."

"Home?" At the word, his lip curled.

"Well, I call this home, you know," and I looked around the room. "Even if it is a boarding house. It's the best I have."

There was a knock on the door and I went to answer it. It was Samuel with the ice water. As I put away the pitcher and was passing Billy's chair in returning to my own, he caught my hand and pressed it to his lips.

"Oh, my dear," he murmured. "Dorothy." And wistfully he looked up at me.

I drew my hand away; then for an instant laid both hands upon his head, pushing him away. "You mustn't, Boy," I said. But I wasn't afraid of him. I was afraid of myself. He was sick and tired and dear; for the moment everything else was blotted out. He was like a child. And it was all I could do to keep from putting my arms around him.

I went back to my chair. There was a long pause; then, with a look at the clock, I said: "It's twenty minutes after nine. You're sick and tired. And I'm going to send you home."

He nodded. "I knew I wasn't fit to make a call. But I wanted to see you."

After he was gone I thought about him a long time. "Every hour I put it off makes it so much harder. But what could I say to him to-night? Next time I'll tell him."

CHAPTER XLIX

"A MAN THAT HAD LIED TO ME!"

"NEXT time" was the following Thursday evening and he brought a magazine; there was a story in it that he wanted me to read aloud. I often read to him while he, lounging in the cozy corner, smoked. So it was to-night.

But when the story was finished, I didn't wait to hear his comments; didn't wait to lose my courage. I went straight over to the cozy corner, drew a chair alongside and sat down.

"Billy," I said, "I want to talk to you."

"All right," he replied; but I thought I caught a tremor in his voice. And he laid down his pipe.

Then I began at the beginning of our acquaintance—even farther back than that. I told him the reasons for the personal, showed him the blankness of my life; told him how for a month before we met his letters filled the blank; recalled to his memory the postscript, "when I see you I'll explain." I reviewed our various meetings, his inaccuracies, the discrepancies in his accounts of things. "And you said you were a chemist. Science is exact. I wanted to trust you, Billy," my voice was very low, but I knew he heard, "and yet there were so many things I couldn't understand. When you were here, your presence banished them. But they came back when you left."

Utterance was even more difficult when I reached the episode of the college catalogues: tears were in the way. But I went on as I could; once I looked at him and saw

that he had shut his eyes. Our encounter on the ferry-boat, the Sunday when he was supposed to be in Pittsburgh, was the last item in the long account. The room was as still as death; the man lay there with closed eyes, motionless.

How long I waited I do not know. It seemed an eternity. At last I spoke again. "You have heard all this. And you have nothing to say?"

"I have a great deal to say. But I'm thinking how to say it."

"So this is a time to search for a phrase?"

He opened his eyes then. "You make it very hard for me, Dorothy," he said; then he rose and began pacing up and down. I rose, too, and stood by the mantelpiece, watching him.

As he turned in front of me, I took a step nearer him and looked straight into his eyes. "You don't need to tell me. I know," I said very slowly. "You are under an assumed name."

"Yes," he said.

At this, some inarticulate lament burst from my lips. I was convinced of it before. I could even say the words myself. But to hear him admit the truth was terrible. "But why?" I moaned. "Why?"

"First I did it for protection, just as you did," he replied.

"Of course. But afterward when you had seen me, when you knew the kind of girl I was?" I felt so weak that I could stand no longer. I sank down on the sofa and motioned him to sit beside me.

"It was the 'Margaret' that caught my eye at first, and what 'Margaret' said piqued my curiosity," he confessed. "I was lonely and discouraged. That was why I wrote. Then your answer came; it opened up a new world to me. For awhile I thought you weren't going to see me ever. But when you wrote at last that I could call I made up my mind to tell you—just as much of the

truth as I could. But the minute I saw you, Dorothy, I knew that I must tell you nothing—or everything. And if I told you everything, you would never see me for the second time. It was cowardly in me: it wasn't fair to you." And his voice died away.

"There's only one explanation of all this," I said. But I never suspected it. "You're married."

"Yes," said he. "Seven years." Then he took a cardcase from his pocket, scribbled an address upon a card where a name only was engraved, and gave the card to me. "That is who I am."

I read it and handed back the card.

"There's something else," he said. "I'm not quite so base as you suppose. The marriage was a mistake. She and I are absolutely uncongenial. We live under the same roof—when I'm in this country—but it's God's truth I am alone. I have had more real companionship, more sympathy, in your letters and your talk than I've ever known before. I want you to promise—not to see me now, of course—but just to write to me. I have to go to England before long, anyway. And I'll get a divorce as soon as possible. That sort of thing is done decently every day; and for less cause, too, than she has given me. And then you and I, Dorothy, will be married—if you'll have me—and start life again."

Horrified, I turned to him. "Do you think I would steal another woman's husband? Do you think I would marry a man that was divorced? A man that had lied to me?"

He winced. "You don't know anything about the temptations of my life."

"No. But I know my own life and I'm sorry for us both. And for every one else that is weary and desolate. But that doesn't alter things." There was a pause. I looked at him, my eyes full of tears. "This is the end, Billy."

Without a word he picked up his hat. I was stand-

ing by the mantelpiece again, and he walked over to me. "I must do just as you say. Good-by, Dorothy. I shall never forget you, dear."

"Good-by."

He kissed my hand; and an instant later he was gone.

Afterward I saw that he had left upon the table the card I had handed back to him. I took it up and turned it over and over; my first impulse was to lock it away in a little tin box I had. But instead I tore it very slowly into several pieces, placed the pieces in the ash-receiver and set fire to them. I watched till they were consumed. Then I emptied the ashes on the ledge outside the window, and the breeze carried them away.

CHAPTER L

JIM

THE sudden cessation of Billy's calls, coupled with the non-arrival of letters addressed to me in the familiar hand, puzzled the people in the boarding house who, grouped on the front steps of an evening through the summer, had been accustomed to watch for his approach: but there was that in my manner which kept even the landlady from questioning me. Discovery that the man was married, knowledge of the deceit he had employed, was, after the first smart of pain, an antidote. I promptly destroyed his letters and determined to blot out the whole episode of our acquaintance from my own memory and from the recollection of those who were observing me.

Accordingly, rising from the blow, I looked life—and my neighbors—straight in the face again, summoning to my aid cheerfulness and buoyancy. Conscious that I had made a dangerous experiment and that it had failed, I was devoutly grateful that the failure had brought no more disaster in its train. The very reaction from the uncertainty of the last few months had in it something wholesome, something curative.

When at the boarding house, I took pains to be agreeable, to overcome my shrinking from the people I liked least. But I absented myself more often than before, and also invited guests more frequently. Mrs. Wells had now returned to town for a short stay and, in so far as our different tasks allowed, we had long walks and talks; sometimes we went to the theater together. Her friend-

ship did much for me: then, too, in my turn, I tried to be a helpful influence to some of the girls with whom my work brought me in touch; girls who were younger than myself and outwardly less fortunately circumstanced; girls for whom my sympathy was deepened by the recent experience. Steeling myself against assaults of envy from within, I also visited my suburban friends and even succeeded in persuading them to come to me in town. And so life went on till Christmas. It wasn't exciting: indeed, it was deadly dull. But I kept my spirits up.

During the holidays, a young man moved into the boarding house whose attitude toward the riddle of existence was a revelation to a girl like me. His name was James Wolcott, and he occupied a hall room on the fourth floor: but before long everybody called him "Jim," and he was welcome everywhere. Twenty-two years old, he was the type of man who, no matter how long he lives, always remains a boy. Light-hearted, good-natured, with little sense of responsibility, but frank and generous and good looking, too, he made friends easily. And it was his fortune that the quick-won friends were disposed to take him as he was, without a thought of that which he was not.

He was under bookkeeper in a wholesale house downtown, and it was clear to me at the outset that he would never be anything else—unless he lost his job! But there seemed to be no likelihood of that. He kept regular hours apparently and, no matter what his inclination may have been, his lack of money was a safeguard against "living high!" In New York one cannot travel far on a salary like his.

What the salary was—and other leading facts of his young life—he told me before he had been in the house two weeks. And although I was not particularly interested in what he said, although I smiled in consciousness of five years' seniority, still, after Billy's reticence, this young man's frankness was refreshing; and I agreed

with him that the refusal of his "boss" to "give him a raise New Year's" was, to say the least, reprehensible.

"And it would be tougher for little Jimmie than it is," he said, one Sunday afternoon later in the winter when he was in my room, "if it wasn't for grandmother up in the country. She gives me an allowance, or else I'd be boarding at the jail." Both of Wolcott's parents were dead, so I was informed, and the grandmother had brought up the boy, alternating between the extremes of indulgence and cruelty.

"Why, I got so many lickings when I was a kid that anybody could stick pins into me," he declared, "and I'd never know it. And then after licking me within an inch of my life—the old lady was well preserved and knew how to cut a switch and how to use it, too—she would turn round and kiss me and call me 'her angel boy.' Of the two I think that was the worst. Only it always ended up with fried chicken and cream-puffs for supper," he smiled reminiscently, "so the days I got a licking had some bright spots after all."

He explained that he moved to this boarding house to please his grandmother. "She's as straight-laced as they make 'em, and *set!* Say, honest, her prejudice is something fierce. If she once gets an idea into her head, nothing can get it out. I lived in Fourteenth Street for awhile, and she was on pins and needles all the time."

"Why, what's the matter with Fourteenth Street?"

"Matter nothing," he replied. "It's all to the good; cheap, too, and I could walk to business—and that saved car fare. But grandmother threw a fit. You see, one time when she was in New York, back in the early nineties, the Seven Sutherland Sisters had a store in Fourteenth Street near Broadway, with a lot of girls with their hair hanging down their back parading in the window. Grandmother was hoofing it from Fourth Avenue to Macy's—she was always in too big a hurry to

wait for the crosstown cars—and she took one look!—and hiked back to Connecticut just as soon as she had bought her three dollars and sixty-seven cents worth of dry goods. You see, she thought the Sutherland racket was some rotten show or other. She was too pig-headed to investigate—and the girls in the window were probably giving away samples of the hair restorer, too—but it queered Fourteenth Street with her for good and all.

"So when I, not knowing anything then about this thing, took a room down there, grandmother threw fits; she threw 'em first in letters, and quoted Scripture at me. And when I went home for over Sunday now and then she would give me a double dose. The very sight of me seemed to bring back those girls of the vintage of eighteen-ninety-two, though goodness knows I don't look like 'em. And they're probably wearing wings—or wigs—by now. But anyway, she wanted me to move: move at once and move uptown! She seemed to think New York got better the farther north you went. But I told her—it was the truth—I was too poor to move; that it would cost a fortune in shoe leather for me to live uptown, for of course, I'd never have car fare any week later than Tuesday afternoon.

"But she kept on chewing the rag. And when I went home Thanksgiving, I told her she needn't ever look for me again; that I had put up with her nagging just as long as I was going to; that she was suggesting things to me, throwing temptation in my way, and a lot of stuff like that.

"That settled it for grandmother; she made up her mind I was going to the devil sure. But the old lady was foxy: from then till traintime she never said another word about Fourteenth Street. She told me how she trusted me, and she gave me enough good things to eat to keel up a dozen men. But after I was gone, she got into her goloshes and went moochin' round the neighborhood—I know as well as if I'd seen her—carrying her

knitting for a blind; and then, after knitting and talking foreign missions for a spell, she'd pin folks down and oblige 'em to give up all they knew or guessed at about boarding houses in New York. And I'll swear she told the whole caboodle," he threw back his head and laughed, "that she was trying to find 'a safe place for Jim'!"

"So she thinks this place is 'safe'?" I asked, eager to hear the rest of it.

"She does. It seems somebody in the village had a friend who had a friend who once upon a time boarded in this house. Grandmother finally got the landlady's address, wrote to her, and engaged a room for me just as if I'd been a deaf mute—or a girl."

"Girls engage their own rooms, thank you," I retorted, with a laugh.

"Oh, I don't mean you, Duchess," and he made me a low bow. "And then, the first I knew, I got one of those half-page letters that make you wonder when you open 'em just what you've done now. And she gave me my orders: I was to move double quick to this address where my room was all engaged; and she said she would give me an allowance to cover the extra cost of living here. That was what cinched it—the allowance!" He gazed meditatively at the ceiling through the haze of his cigar.

"I can imagine how that hurt."

"You see my mother was her daughter and she married Dad against the old lady's express command. Dad wasn't any great shakes, I guess; anyway he wasn't one of these Captains of Industry you hear about. But he's dead now, so why chew the rag? But grandmother can't see it. When she's mad at me she tells me I take after him, and that she expects to see me in the gutter yet; and that I'm not going to have any of her money to throw away. Not that there's much of it," he went on quickly. "It wouldn't take me long. And then, after

roasting Dad, she'll turn round and tell me, if I happen to do something to suit, that I'm just like all her folks. Can you beat it?"

I shook my head.

"At any rate, she has got me away from Fourteenth Street now. But she won't be satisfied till she has been down here to inspect this place. Say, if you see an old lady coming down the street some day all dressed up like a broken arm, you may know it's grandmother. I think," he surveyed me critically, "she would approve of you."

"Well," said I, "I don't think I'd approve of her."

"You don't have to," he laughed. "All you have to do is approve of me."

But I couldn't entirely. In him I saw little trace of qualities which I much admired in man: self-reliance, determination, energy. In my eyes, his lack of ambition was a serious defect. To be content with the position of under bookkeeper and to glory in the fact that his grandmother helped to pay his board and clothe him, stamped him, even at twenty-two, I thought, as one in whom I could never take much interest. But that was no drawback: I was weary of being interested in men. In each case my sympathy had been so misplaced that it was almost a relief to meet a young man now whose weaknesses were obvious. "At all events, I know the worst of him," I said.

On the other hand, I did not ignore the good. Aside from the attractive qualities I have mentioned, Jim Wolcott always looked immaculate: as clean and wholesome as if he took a bath every hour or so. And although his grandmother paid for them, he did wear good clothes; and he wore them well. His good looks were his own, and of them, too, he appeared unconscious. On the whole he was decidedly a young man to whom any girl at first sight would be drawn.

Whether she liked him when he began to talk, would

depend on several things: to me, inured to the serious side of life, accustomed from the start to fight my own battles and familiar with many tragedies, a talk with Jim Wolcott was invigorating. He was as breezy as his slang, as carefree as a child. I would come home from the office weary and depressed. But the minute I saw him, I cast off instinctively the mantle of fatigue and donned mentally what he himself would have denominated my "glad rags." The very fact that he knew nothing of my perplexities, that he couldn't have understood them if he tried, banished them from my own mind.

I have said that he was a favorite with everybody in the boarding house; indeed, he reconciled the rest of us to each other's society. In the dining-room there was now an air of conviviality that at times reminded me of the atmosphere at Mrs. Miggs's, though the quality of the talk was far inferior. But it is undeniable that the house in West Seventy —— Street had, after Jim Wolcott's arrival there, a good-fellowship it had never known before.

By and by if people didn't know where to find him of an evening, they came to my room to inquire. Often he and I were there alone: but it often happened, too, that others kept us company; and the more the merrier, from my point of view. Welcoming Wolcott as diversion myself, I had no wish to monopolize him. Frequently I invited other boarders, married couples, single men whose existence I had scarcely recognized before, and especially a couple of girls who were younger than I was, to spend the evening in my room.

The room was large and easily lent itself to the uses of boarding-house hospitality. I always had something on hand to eat; and the men could smoke and talk and joke. The presence of Wolcott—or, as everybody called him, "Jim"—was sufficient to guarantee entertainment of some sort.

He could sing a little and play on the mandolin and

recite and tell stories in different dialects; while he did none of these things remarkably well—except the negro dialect—his unaffected manner, his evident desire to please and, above all, his high spirits, were irresistible.

It seemed to me a pity that for his own sake he did not turn his social gifts to practical account; or, in other words, that he did not devote as much attention to getting on in business as he did to giving pleasure to mere acquaintances: but it was not in his make-up to do so; he was naturally gregarious, the desire to entertain was spontaneous, his success came of itself. Business on the other hand, was nothing but a grind; bookkeeping was drudgery. And it followed as matter of course that he tried to escape the grind, and submitted to the drudgery only in so far as it was inevitable. The necessaries of life and his liking for good clothes forced him, as he expressed it, to "hold down a job." But he had no ambition to secure a better hold, to make himself valuable to the firm by whom he was employed; hail-fellow-well-met with every one, he would divide his last crust with a stranger, and for his next mouthful would as easily look to the next stranger on the road.

It is my wish to present Jim as he was: but I find myself reluctant to speak ill of him. The truth is I did not rate him very high; however, it sometimes happened when perhaps I had made up my mind that he was a weak creature with nothing to recommend him but a cheap-and-easy friendliness that cost him no effort and was bestowed on every one, he would surprise me by some depth.

For instance, when his grandmother died—suddenly, of pneumonia, in April—I was amazed at the genuineness of his grief. In her lifetime he spoke with such gusto of her foibles, with such uncomplimentary references to her discipline; in fact, he made so much fun of her and presented her in such an unattractive light, that I expected her demise would call forth only mourning of the

most perfunctory sort. But he was so chastened, so subdued the evening he received the telegram which informed him of her death, that I scarcely knew what to make of him. He was going home that evening; but there was still an hour before traintime and he spent the hour with me.

"Gee, but she was good to me," he kept repeating, as he paced up and down. "And I plagued the life out of her."

This change of attitude, or the revelation of another side of a character which I fancied I had fully understood, made me feel that perhaps I hadn't been quite just to him before. And something else disturbed me at this time: it was the discovery of the extent to which I missed him while he was away. I had been so sure that I looked upon him only as a makeshift, a harmless precaution to keep my mind from dwelling on unpleasant memories, as a relief from the serious side of life, that it was disconcerting to realize I missed him on his own account. The customary "Hello, Duchess," with which he greeted me when I came home at night, made the silence all the deeper now; I even caught myself counting the hours till his return.

Then I took myself to task. The mere fact that Jim Wolcott was five years my junior would have been sufficient, the way I felt about it then, to bar him from serious consideration, even had he been eligible otherwise.

"But he isn't eligible and he's nothing but a boy," said I, reading a letter from him that had just arrived. It was the second letter in two days, and he was coming home to-morrow. One of the married men—the one who just now in the dining-room had gone to meet the postman and, after a glance at the postmark on the envelope handed the letter on to me—had commented on this. "Invite me to the wedding, won't you?" he called after me, as I left the room.

I pretended not to hear, but the question made me furious. Why couldn't everybody see that I liked Jim Wolcott only as a friend? that I looked upon him as a boy, not as a man whom any one might think of marrying? And I resolved, as I went upstairs to read the letter, that I would put an end to this nonsense. If I couldn't be good friends with a mere boy like him without having people joke about a wedding, then we would be strangers from now on.

But it wasn't a stranger's letter—it wasn't even the letter of a friend that I was holding in my hand. If I had picked it up somewhere without knowing who wrote it, or to whom it was addressed, I should have called it a love-letter. But with the memory of Jim's roguish face before me, with his laughter ringing in my ears, with the recollection of the banter which made up so large a part of our daily talk, the idea was absurd. This was only some new joke of Jim's. And I made up my mind to snub the boy the instant he came home.

CHAPTER LI

DRIFTING

BUT when I saw him next he wore a new suit of black, and there was sorrow in his face. There was also something else that I had never seen in his face before, though all he said was, "Hello, Duchess."

And I answered in the same words I had used many times before, "Hello, Jim." But there was a difference, and we both were conscious of it.

I have told of my surprise at the effect on him of his grandmother's death; I couldn't snub him now when he came to me for sympathy, came to tell me all the details of the past three days; and I had never really liked him in his joking half so well as I liked this sober boy. But I was none the less resolved to nip at once any budding sentiment. If he had only been some one else—not any one in particular, but a man of character, of ambition, of suitable age—how gladly would I have welcomed what I saw. But he wasn't some one else. He was Jim Wolcott, and five years younger than I was. Accordingly, just as soon as life settled down to the old routine, I started in to divert his interest.

"Come in," said I, one stormy evening when I heard his knock upon the door. I was fussing with some papers at my desk and didn't look up as he entered; but out of the corner of one eye I saw that he had brought his mandolin.

"We're going to have a real literary and musical evening, Duchess," he announced.

"All right," said I. "I'll go get Miss Darley."

(She was a girl about his age who had a hall room on that floor.) "It's raining and she's sure to be at home."

"No, you don't," said he, planting himself in front of me. "Will you kindly tell me why you always try to drag in that left-over lemon when I'm here?"

"'Left-over lemon,'" I said the words after him. "Why, she's younger than you are. And you know," smiling up at him, "that's pretty young."

"Well, you've no call to kick. You're nothing but a big kid yourself."

"H'mph! I'm five years older than you are."

"So I've heard you say before," he observed, rubbing his chin reflectively. "It seems to stick in your crop."

I made a little grimace. "Age is the least of my troubles. But it's absurd for a boy like you to be wasting so much time on a woman of my years."

He greeted this remark as if it were the best kind of a joke. "Excuse me. But you make me laugh." There was a pause, then he went on. "We may as well settle this age thing right now. It cuts no ice. You suit me down to the ground and everybody else can go hang. See? Now listen to this," and he began strumming on his mandolin. When he had gone through his repertoire, he smoked, and gave me, while I sewed, an amusing account of the happenings of the day.

Then an interruption came: one of the married women in the house ran in to show me her new hat. And Jim—jolly, genial Jim, whom I had never seen out of sorts before—was almost rude to her. I made every effort to detain her, but Jim's manner offset my cordiality. After she had gone I spoke to him about it.

He pounded an unoffending cushion. "That woman makes me tired!"

"Why?" I slowly bit my thread. "I thought you liked her."

"I like her well enough when she stays where she be-

longs," he answered, irritably. "What with your trying to drag the whole bunch into this room and their coming of their own accord, it's as much as I can do to get two words with you alone."

I laughed and pointed to the clock. "And you've been here since a quarter after eight." It was now a little before ten.

"Does that mean you want me to go?"

"Why—" I hesitated.

But he jumped up, scowling. "You needn't say it any plainer. Guess I know when I'm in the way." And he slammed the door behind him and went stamping up the stairs to his own room. For some time I mused over his outburst; then I drew a long breath of relief. "It solves the difficulty, anyway," I thought.

Half an hour later a folded piece of paper was slipped underneath my door; a little while I left it there, but curiosity conquered in the end. I picked it up, unfolded it, and this is what I read:

"DEAR DUCHESS:

"I'm sorry I was cross, and I can't go to bed without saying so. It's only that I hate folks for butting in when I want you to myself. Good-night, Peaches and Cream. "JIM."

The next day was Wednesday and I kept thinking, "Well, he won't be here this evening, at any rate." For some time Wednesday evening had been a joke with us. After dinner Wednesday, Jim invariably stopped in my room on his way out of the house and tried to make me curious about his Wednesday evening "date."

But I never inquired. In the first place, I didn't care: then, too, I suspected, from his eagerness to have me ask where he was going, that he wouldn't tell me anyway. So this evening when he appeared ready to go out, I said, "Oh, it's Wednesday again, isn't it?"

He nodded. "Now, honest, don't you wish you knew where I am headed for?"

I shrugged my shoulders and answered condescendingly, "Why, my dear boy, that is your own affair."

"There you go with 'boy' again. See here, I wish you'd cut that out." Then he pleaded so earnestly that I would "treat him halfway decent," that he almost convinced me I had been unkind.

To cut him short, however, and stand my own ground, too, I said, "Run along, Mr. Man, or you'll be late."

"I'll tell you where I'm going," he volunteered. "I'm going to a dance."

"You are?" I cried, regarding him with envy. "What luck!"

"Yes," he agreed. "I suppose I am in luck to have the price."

"Oh, so it's a public ball? Like the Arion, or the Charity Ball?"

Jim grinned. "Not enough like 'em so you'd notice it, I guess." He looked at me as if he were wondering whether to make a clean breast of it. "In plain English, Duchess," he announced at last, watching to see how I would receive the news, "I'm going to the Wednesday evening 'reception' of a mick dancing school downtown." And he showed me a ticket that had been punched several times.

"What's the difference," said I, "so long as it is decent? I'd rather dance than eat, myself. Only I never have the chance. You lucky—" I was going to say "boy" again, but remembered just in time. "You lucky fellow! How long have you been going there?"

"All winter. I didn't dare to tell you." He looked at me dubiously. "Say, Duchess, you wouldn't go down there with me, would you?"

I rearranged the magazines. "Not unless I was invited," I replied.

He took me by the hand and turned me round facing

him. "I want to see if you mean it," he explained. "I'd give anything to have you go. But I'm afraid—well, you see, they're not your sort. Most of the girls are waitresses, I guess, or shop girls or manicures."

"I don't care," said I. "We're all made of the same stuff. Of course, I should prefer a dance at a private house. But I don't know any people in New York, so if I dance at all it must be in some place like that. But," I stopped aghast, "it is six years and over since I have danced a step. Perhaps you'd rather have the shop girls, after all."

"Some of 'em are cooks," he grinned. "There was a woman there one night—and if she didn't weigh three hundred pounds I'll eat my hat—that grabbed me as if I was a flapjack she was yanking off the stove. One of the assistants asked me to dance with her—because I'm such a good-natured-looking cuss, I guess, but—" with an emphatic gesture, "never again."

"I won't have to dance with strangers, will I?" I inquired, uncertain what might be the etiquette of this realm unknown.

Jim shook his fist in the direction of downtown. "Just let me catch one of that bunch trying to dance with you! You and I will flock by ourselves."

"What time do we have to start?" said I.

"Any time," said he. "I suppose you want me to clear out of here?"

I nodded.

"Well, don't wear your best clothes," he cautioned, as he turned back from the door. "There'll be an awful rabble there."

"All right. I'll meet you in the parlor in ten minutes."

That evening was the first of many like it, though later we avoided Wednesday and chose another evening when the hall was less likely to be thronged.

How large a place is filled by an "academy" like the

one we patronized is unknown to the great mass of well-to-do New Yorkers who meet in one another's homes. There were disadvantages about dancing in such a place. But it was the only place we had: it was eminently respectable, it was cheap, the floor was excellent, and, in the opinion of us both, it was vastly better than not to dance at all.

Jim danced very well. In childhood, he, like myself, had been taught to believe that dancing was wicked; his grandmother and my Aunt Jane were at one upon that point: consequently, when we had opportunity to decide things for ourselves, both of us had taken up the pastime with great zest.

My life was now so different from what it had been before that sometimes I used to wonder if I were really the same girl. I was living on the surface now, and it was very restful after my experience of the depths: once in an agreeable environment, I seemed to have the power to cast off the shadows of the past. Jim wasn't everything my heart desired, even as a friend—the only light in which thus far I would consider him—but he was a dear boy, I told myself; and after so much beating against the bars, it was a novelty to drift idly on from day to day and have some one think me charming, no matter what I did.

CHAPTER LII

"YOU'VE GOT TO MARRY ME"

ONE Sunday in the spring when we were going to explore a bit of country to the north of us, I suggested a certain line of surface cars as the best means of getting there. The day was beautiful, and I said much to Jim of the long, pleasant ride that lay before us in the open car. Well, it *was* long and pleasant, there is no doubt of that; but the car branched off somewhere when I least expected it, and finally landed us in an open lot, miles from the destination I had had in mind.

As we stood out in the open, just the two of us, in that bare stretch of land, Jim looked around him thoughtfully, as if trying to hit upon some excuse for our presence there; then he gave it up and with a smile remarked: "Say, Duchess, you aren't much on planning these Cooks' Tours, are you?"

"No," said I, "and I ought to have known better than to try."

Thereafter, Jim was guide on all our expeditions; and there were many of them. Throughout the summer we spent together many of the Saturday half-holidays, the Sundays, and many of the evenings, too. That he was fond of me, I knew; but I thought it was only a passing fancy. As such I made light of it: for instance, he was always jokingly asking me to marry him, and the idea was so absurd that I always laughed at him. Once, I remember, when we were dancing, he whispered in my ear, "I'd like to waltz through life with you."

"Ah, Jim," said I, more seriously than I often spoke to him, "life is something different from a waltz."

"Well, then," he replied, "make it a two-step. I don't care, so long as you're my partner."

His free-and-easy manner of turning everything into a joke threw me off my guard. To my mind, marriage was a serious thing, and the feeling it implied was very different from the gayety with which he assured me every little while that I "could pack my clothes in his trunk any time," that I was "the whole outfit," and that "there wasn't any other dress goods on the map." But it was, indeed, just because of his light-heartedness—and also because there was no one else on my horizon—that I spent so much time with him. I wanted to blot out the memory of the past, and his society was the best means at my disposal to that end.

When we visited a summer garden or amusement park, we always danced, if dancing was a feature of the place; and we ate peanuts, rode in the merry-go-round, and went through the entire program of "stunts." The amount of money that Jim spent troubled me, and I said so; but my words had no effect. He had received a little money from his grandmother, and was to have a little more when the estate was settled; but in my opinion he was not only generous, he was extravagant. In vain I endeavored to persuade him to start a bank account: he only brought me an extra box of candy when I mentioned economy! Several times I refused to accompany him to places of amusement which I felt were beyond his means. But he either went alone and reported later that he "spent three times as much because he was so blue," or he remained at home and found fault with me because I "kept the two of us from having a good time." In the end I usually went with him: it was easier that way.

For one thing, there was less danger in public of his being sentimental; and though on all occasions I aimed to

steer clear of dangerous ground, it wasn't always easy, as time went on, to laugh at him when he attempted to make love to me. He was more serious about it now and, aside from opposing him, I had to struggle with my own inclination to listen to what he said. Long months of propinquity were having their effect; and as well the persistence of this good-looking, wholesome, light-hearted young man who, I had decided long before, was so ineligible. More and more his defects were kept in the background: only the best was presented to my view. And he was always there.

On Labor Day we went out to New Jersey, tramped in the country all day long, and took luncheon in mid-afternoon at a primitive restaurant underneath the trees. All day Jim was in the best of spirits, flitting like some gay butterfly from one subject to another as he talked to me; it was all amusing, what he said, and the serene September afternoon, full of pulsing light, seemed to smile back at us in our joy.

On the way home in the evening, he was very quiet. The boat was crowded, and for lack of seats we leaned against the rail. I remember how black the water was as we gazed down at it; and how New York loomed up across the river; and how the new moon's crescent tipped against the tops of the high buildings that stood out against the sky. Neither of us spoke. But the tall figure at my side bent toward me protectingly, and, under cover of the darkness, a hand stole over mine that rested on the rail; thus in silence, but with the throbbing sense of each other's nearness, we went home.

When we reached the house and I stepped into my own room from the hall, Jim followed me. A little unsteadily he said, "I'm going to light the gas for you." But once the door was closed, he took me in his arms.

And I made no effort to resist. I was so tired and he was so strong, that, in the haziness of the moment, his

arms seemed to have been made just to shelter me. Heretofore I had kept him at a distance; but now to be caught up in his embrace, to kiss him for good night, appeared the one right ending for our day; even the strangeness of being there with him in the dark alone, of which I was conscious at the very first, was soon transformed into something natural, something that should be. And as I heard his voice in tremulous intensity, I wound my arms the closer round his neck.

At last a step out in the hall recalled me to myself. It was only some one on the way upstairs without any knowledge or any thought of us. But I started back and listened.

"What is it, dear?" breathed Jim, and drew me close again.

But the spell was broken now. Wriggling my way free, I faltered, "Aren't—you—going to light the gas?"

For answer he struck a match. With the gas blazing high, the familiar aspect of the room proclaimed the old established order of the commonplace: the carpet was just as worn, the clock ticked with the same monotony. But we were different.

I stood by the table taking off my hat; then I laid the hatpins down straight and even in a row. I hadn't looked at Jim.

But now he came close to me and took both my hands. "Duchess," he said, huskily, and looking up I saw that he was very pale, "you've got to marry me."

For the moment to me, too, that seemed the next step. With his kisses on my lips I couldn't speak as I had spoken heretofore; but neither could I agree unthinkingly. "What would we live on, Jim?" I said.

"We would live as other folks do." And the seriousness of his manner, the sincerity of his tone, convinced me for the time. "If I had you to work for, it would make a man of me."

As he spoke, the clock struck; and realization of the

lateness of the hour drove all else from my mind. "It's eleven o'clock," I cried. "We can't settle this to-night."

"It *is* settled," he replied. "We're going to get married."

"Won't you please go, Jim?" I pleaded. "It's *so* late."

"I'll go just as soon as you kiss me good night again—the way a Duchess ought to that's properly engaged. Here, sweetheart."

If there had been in Jim that night any uncertainty, any disposition to leave the decision in my hands, he could have pleaded till doomsday without persuading me. But it was his assumption of authority, coupled with my belief in his affection for me, that won the victory.

For a long moment lifted in his arms—how I gloried in his strength—I remembered that through the words he had just spoken I belonged to him. And the panorama of the past—all the longing, the denial—swam before my eyes. "But this at last is mine."

Gently he set me down and stood looking at me and brushing back the hair from my forehead. At last he opened the door. "Good night," he said.

"Good night," I whispered, and watched him halfway up the stairs.

CHAPTER LIII

"DAMN THAT MEDDLESOME OLD MAID"

IF Jim had had his way in the next few days, everybody in the house would have been told of our engagement. But on that point I stood firm. "Wait till our plans are made. We must look before we leap."

"We didn't look the other evening. And that's the best day's work I ever did."

This reference troubled me: I felt that I was bound to Jim, and yet the more I thought of marriage, the more it seemed impossible. Aside from the obstacles I have mentioned, there was another that disturbed me most of all: he had told me recently that his father died a drunkard's death.

"I don't dare to drink," he said, recounting the family history. "If I once began it wouldn't need a fortune-teller to dope out the finish."

I shuddered, remembering Theodore Prime and his caution the day I saw him last: "Don't you ever let anybody fool you with that pipe dream about 'reforming drunkards,'" he had said. So now to lay the foundation for the whole structure of one's life and, perhaps, of other lives as well, on what seemed to be but shifting sand, terrified me when I was alone and could calmly think things out.

In Jim's presence, there was little opportunity to think: he took everything for granted in his blithesome way. If I objected to his sitting around and keeping me from work, he had an answer ready: if it wasn't a button that he wanted me to sew on his coat, it was a glove to

mend, or some other pretext to be in my room. The people in the house, seeming to understand that marriage was imminent, gave him full opportunity to see me alone.

One evening, he was insisting for the hundredth time that we must be married soon. "What are we going to live on?" I inquired, also for the hundredth time.

"Oh, bread—and cheese—and kisses," he replied.

"Well, bread and cheese, at least, cost money."

"What of it? When we're broke we'll cut 'em out," he said. "And I'll feed you kisses. See, this way," and he caught me in his arms.

It was always so: if I objected to any plan of his, he would stop my mouth with kisses and—I have set out to tell the truth—and so I must confess that this method silenced me for the time, at least.

It is easy enough for any one whose own life has been happier, all the sides of whose nature have been satisfied, to say that I was weak: that if my better judgment told me marriage with this man was unadvisable, I should have dismissed him once for all. Well, I do not dispute it. I only know that I was twenty-eight years old and this was the first time in all my life there was any one to care for me; the first time there was no aching sense of being left out, of missing what other people had. And only a woman with the same temperament and experience knows what that means.

It is, indeed, my own contention that a woman, situated as I was, a woman who has been alone for years in a city like New York, where from the nature of the case she is shut out from the normal experiences of young womanhood, is pitifully handicapped when a crisis comes. The hunger for affection, the craving to be like other women and have what other women have—I am not speaking of superficial matters but of the primal needs—is so strong that it outweighs all else. Of course,

a starving creature is not the best judge of food. She takes what she can get—and thanks God for that.

But it isn't entirely—or even chiefly, I believe—the desire of being loved that, when defeated, brings such devastation in its train. It is the yearning to give, to help, to serve. It is the best in us and it hurts us most.

So let the reader who in his own experience knows nothing of all this, smile in the easy superiority of a well-rounded life and say, "That girl was a fool!" So be it: it only proves my point that a big city like New York is no place for a girl alone.

Much is said and rightly of the strength that comes from conflict, of the influence of temptation in the forming of character. We all know that the individual who aspires to be "wafted to the skies on flowery beds of ease" would never accomplish much, either in heaven or on earth. But the flowery-beds-of-ease proposition is not the one that confronts the working girl in the city of New York. She will find there, as elsewhere, plenty of conflict to bring out whatever strength she has. But she will also find—and this is the pith of all I have to say—unnatural conditions of existence which, far from developing character (for development implies harmony with nature) will warp and weaken what might be fine and strong.

And so I went over and over my own problem, buffeted by the impulse that would lead me straight to Jim, and by other influences that would lead me far from him. Even had I wished without any wavering to get rid of him, I could not send him from the house; it was a boarding house, and he had just as much right there as I had. He understood that his hold on me—which he aimed to strengthen every day—was due in the first instance to the accident of our living under the same roof. Had we met only at infrequent intervals, he would probably have had no interest in me; and I should doubtless

never have given him a second thought, save that he was good looking and agreeable.

But seeing him almost constantly, and seeing no one else—above all having listened to him once—I could not, so it seemed to me, turn a deaf ear afterward. A kiss was sacred to me; and having kissed him of my own free will, I felt that I belonged to him. And I endeavored to think out some way whereby the marriage for which he pleaded—for which my own heart pleaded, too—might be brought about.

I had always believed that a married woman had—or should have—no place in the business world: that she found her work, her joy, in caring for the home and family. But how could Jim, who was scarcely able to provide for one, take care of both of us? I had no money, and the little he received from his grandmother's estate was already spent. How could he maintain even the simplest home? It was not now ambition, not longing for luxury, that made me hesitate. I was willing to put up with privations, willing to do my share to build up our life together, if—*if* I could only make myself believe that the attitude of the man himself was right: that he would do his share. Mrs. Wells, the friend who by her counsel had helped me once before, was now abroad, or I should doubtless have talked things over with her. She was governess in a family that traveled much; indeed, I had not seen her since the beginning of my acquaintance with Jim.

He had told me that having me to work for "would make a man of him": I wondered if it would turn out that way. That he thought so I believed, but that was no guarantee against mistake; and the innate tendency to drink I could not ignore. The picture of Theodore Prime the day I lunched with him was ever before my eyes, and ringing in my ears was the caution that he spoke. Prime's mother, so he told me, had done everything she could to help his father: but it did no good.

Jim, however, was not in such case: he knew his danger and avoided drink. If I could be sure, I told myself, that our marriage would be a real help to him, that it would safeguard him against his father's fate, I would marry him at once.

I was even deliberating resigning my position and was casting about meantime for some work that I could do at home, for I knew that only by my continuing to earn, for a time, at least, would it be possible for us to marry; Jim and I were interviewing agents and inspecting flats, when our quest was interrupted by a bad cough that kept him in the house. To be sure he was away from business only a day or two, but bad weather followed, and I urged him to avoid needless exposure till he was well again.

When he was ailing, he appealed to my sympathy and affection even more than had been the case before. So far as my observation goes, all men when they are ill are like small boys: and to the mother-heart in every woman small boys are irresistible. Jim, moreover, was so gentle and uncomplaining, so appreciative of my solicitude, that all I wanted was to take care of him.

One evening—it was still September, three weeks after Labor Day—and before he was entirely recovered from his cough, Jim was talking to me in my room.

"But I mustn't devote the whole evening to you," I exclaimed at last. "I brought home from the office a report to work on that we're in a hurry for."

"I should think you did enough for that blooming society working all day long," grumbled Jim, "without working all night, too."

I put my hand over his lips to cut short his complaints. "You are surely getting well when you begin to scold."

"How long will it take you?" He nodded toward the pile of papers on my desk.

"The best part of the evening, I'm afraid. But I'll

tell you what," I said, brightening, "you sit down over there with that magazine—there's an awfully good story in it—and don't say one word to me, and I'll do my level best to get through in time so we can go over to Hoefel Garden for a little while." Hoefel Garden was a German place not far away, where there was an excellent orchestra, and we spent many evenings there.

"All right," Jim agreed. "But I'm pretty good-natured to let you work at all. By rights, the evenings belong to me."

"Who said so?" I demanded.

"I did," said he; and we both laughed. Then with a warning glance, half jest, half earnest, he took out his watch and laid it on the table in front of him. "I'll give you just one hour and fifteen minutes for that job—then us for Hoefel Garden."

I started in at once and for some time worked rapidly; then, turning round to see how Jim was making out, inquired, "How's the story?"

"On the bum."

"Why don't you go over to Hoefel Garden now," I suggested, "and then come back for me if you want me by and by?"

"And have you tell me it's too late? Not much," said Jim. "I don't stir out of here alone." And he held up his watch.

"I'm hurrying just as fast as I can," I pleaded. "I hate to keep you waiting."

At this he walked over to the desk and kissed me. "I know it, dear. You're all to the good. I'd rather be here, with you chained to the desk like this, than anywhere else without you." And he stood there, stroking my hair and watching me as I wrote.

Finally I looked up at him; a hot wave of color swept over me. "I—wish—you wouldn't, Jim. I—can't work so fast. An hour and a quarter is pretty short for this."

"You take all the time you want," he said, and went over to the cozy corner couch.

The cozy corner was diagonally across the room from where I sat; for some time there was no sound save the scratching of my pen. When I reached the bottom of one page, I paused and listened. The room was very still.

"Jim," said I, "what are you up to?"

There was no response. I turned to look at him; he was lying all curled up in the cozy corner like a child. I tiptoed over there; he was fast asleep. Hastily throwing the afghan over him, I went back to my work.

A few minutes later I heard outside my door the excited voice of the chambermaid. "Miss Baldwin," she said, and tapped quickly on the door. "Miss Baldwin."

I went to her at once, stepped out into the hall and closed the door, so that Jim should not be disturbed—and so that no one could look in. His cough had kept him awake for several nights and I was glad to have him sleep, though I should have felt more comfortable had he been in his own room upstairs.

"Oh, Miss Baldwin," cried the girl, "there's a cranky woman come to see you. I said I didn't know if you was home, but I would come up an' see. An' *she* said she knew you was, an' that she was in a hurry an' was comin' right up to your room. But I got ahead of her. There she is," and the girl pointed to a tall, angular figure that was toiling up the stairs.

It was Miss Parker, a middle-aged spinster who was my assistant in the office. Miss Parker lived in the settlement, and, when an important memorandum pertaining to the work I had taken home to do this evening was discovered in the office after I had left, she was sent uptown with it. As it happened, I didn't need the memorandum. I had made a copy of it for my work and purposely left the original behind in its proper place, lest some chance befall it in my hands.

But all this made no difference in the situation now: Miss Parker disliked me, anyway; she was resentful that a woman younger than herself filled a position of greater responsibility. She had been obliged to make a long, tedious journey to my boarding place in order to remedy what she thought was carelessness of mine; and scowling she came toward me in the hall.

Months before she had once been in my room; she knew its size and all the furnishings; naturally she expected to enter now. Instead I stood before the door—the door beyond which a young man lay asleep!

"I'm very sorry," I said, and heard my voice tremble on the words, "that you've had this tiresome trip. Will you rest a moment in the parlor? I'll be down directly." There was an agitation in my emphasis that I feared she would observe.

"In the *parlor?*" She hurled the word at me. "But I came up to your room on purpose to save time!" Miss Parker was a determined woman; she was never known to yield a point, no matter how trifling it might be, save after long debate.

I was in terror lest some of the people in the boarding house should happen on us there; or, worst of all, that Jim himself, hearing the confusion, should waken and come to the door to find out what it was all about. It seemed to me that I should scream if she didn't go.

But she didn't go and I didn't scream. "Perhaps you've got company?" she persisted, coming nearer. "Well, I sha'n't stay long." And then, as if remembering that she was wasting precious time, she made a move as if to open the door herself.

But I stepped back sharply, preventing her; then summoning all the dignity I could command, I looked straight into her face and said, "Miss Parker, it is not convenient for me to receive you in my room. Will you please go to the parlor?"

Shrugging her shoulders, she started for the staircase, then I followed. Doubtless it only *seemed* to me that she walked more slowly than I had ever seen her walk before. But once we were out of range of my door, I breathed more easily, and by the time we reached the parlor without meeting any one, I was myself again. Throughout her brief call I exerted myself, as never before with her, to be agreeable; and when she left the house she had evidently forgotten our clashing in the hall.

But for me it had far-reaching influence. First of all it brought home to me a sudden sense of the light in which enemies—ay, and friends, too, perhaps—might view the situation of Jim Wolcott and myself. To me, as I sat there at work this evening, it seemed so right, so natural for him to be there, too, that not until I was confronted by the possibility of another's presence was I at all disturbed. And now as I went upstairs, I knew that I had done no wrong, that Jim had done no wrong—and yet I was profoundly grateful that my caller had departed no wiser than she came. Then what did it mean—this inner consciousness of right, and along with it the immeasurable relief that Miss Parker did not discover Jim in my room asleep? I could not see my way: to myself I seemed to be walking in a fog.

Leaning over the banister on his own floor, Jim was on the watch for me when I came upstairs; as I reached the landing he ran down to meet me, opened the door of my room, and gently pushed me in; then following and closing the door, he said, penitently, "I'm sorry, Duchess. I had no idea of dropping off to sleep. But she didn't find out, did she?"

I shook my head. "Then you heard us?"

"Sure. That woman would wake the dead."

"I was afraid you would rush out in the hall while we were talking there."

"What do you take me for?" said Jim. "I hid in

the alcove till I was sure you had her headed off. Then I made tracks for upstairs."

The very words we used in explaining matters to ourselves were like a stab to me: "hid"—"find out"—"headed off"—"afraid." I stood staring straight beyond Jim at the wall.

"What makes you look so sober? There's no harm done," he said. "Here, kiss me and forget it, dear."

But I warded him off. All at once the fog cleared away. "Jim," said I, solemnly, "this has got to stop."

"What do you mean by 'this'?" Unconsciously his voice dropped to the pitch of mine.

"Your being in my room so much."

"Then marry me," he begged. "It will be my room then, and all the old maids in creation can't drive me out."

This reference to the evening's visitor only strengthened my resolve to avoid a repetition of the episode, and to be honest with myself and Jim. I said to him what I had never said before: told him my ideal of marriage, showed him all my doubts and fears for the future of us two. He listened very gravely.

At the close I said: "I don't know what is best. My vision is beclouded because we are so near. Absence would help us both, I think, to see things as they are."

"I don't need any help," he said. "I see things as they are right now. And I know what I want."

"Then surely you won't grudge me the chance to work out the problem by myself. Whatever I decide to do, I mean to have no regrets." And I suggested that he move to another boarding house.

Jim looked blank. "Why, I don't see how I can." And he enumerated the difficulties in the way, emphasizing the amount of money it would cost.

"Never mind," said I. "I'll move instead. I only

asked you first, because I thought you had less luggage here and it would be easier for you. But I'll find some place."

This angered him. "It's all nonsense. Damn that meddlesome old maid!"

CHAPTER LIV

SEEKING ANOTHER HOME

NEXT day I secured from a board directory a list of boarding places and of private families who had rooms to let. I was tired of a boarding house table and all the dining-room familiarities, and the idea appealed to me to rent a room in a private house and take my meals at restaurants; that would give me more freedom than I now enjoyed and more variety. The locality I chose as limit for my search was far downtown from the view-point of West Seventy —— Street, in an old-fashioned, residential section of the town.

It so happened that the room available at the third address I visited was admirably adapted to my needs. Mr. and Mrs. Raine were the only occupants of the house they owned, their children having long since married and set up homes elsewhere. Thus far they had never had strangers in their house, but for several reasons had now decided to rent the large front room on the top floor if they could find a tenant of whom they approved. They seemed to regard me favorably and I certainly liked them—and the room. This extended the full width of the house; "southern exposure" to the extent of three large windows was provided; furthermore the room was made more homelike by an open fire; there was hot and cold water and plenty of closet room.

In case I engaged the room, it was to be fitted up as a place where I could receive my friends, though I stipulated for the privilege of using the reception-room downstairs whenever I desired. The whole appearance of the

house was so pleasing, Mr. and Mrs. Raine were so attractive—it did my heart good to see such an old-fashioned, placid couple in New York—and the price they set upon the room was so moderate, that altogether I congratulated myself on my good luck. When we reached the point of references I mentioned the name of the organization by which I was employed.

Mr. Raine said the name after me, and exclaimed, "Then you must have known Mrs. Grey?"

"Mrs. Grey?" I cried, joyfully. "Indeed I did. I was her secretary for five years. I owe everything to her."

"That's enough for us," said Mr. Raine, turning to his wife, "isn't it, Mother?"

"Mother," agreeing, smiled at me. "What a small world it is," she mused. "We didn't see so much of Mrs. Grey of late years, after she started that society. But when her husband was alive we used to meet them often at my oldest daughter's. She and Mrs. Grey were very intimate till my daughter went out West to live."

We made the bargain then and there; and, on my way to the uptown Elevated station, I inspected the restaurant the Raines had recommended as convenient and low-priced.

The coming interview with Mrs. Tate, the landlady in West Seventy —— Street, I dreaded all the way uptown. I had been so satisfied with my room, so appreciative of her efforts to do everything she could to make me comfortable in her house, and I had such a genuine liking for her, too, that I shrank from breaking the news to her that I was going to leave. I couldn't tell her the real reason why; and I hated a "circumbendibus."

But the interview was comparatively easy, after all. Mrs. Tate listened without remark to the excuse I made about the long distance to the office from Seventy —— Street, and to my account of the difficulties of the trip in winter; also to the statement that I wanted to try eating

at restaurants awhile. But though she said nothing significant, I suspected by the way she looked at me from out her shrewd, kind eyes, that she understood I was leaving her house to get away from Jim. At all events she and I parted on the best of terms.

To Jim himself I made it very clear that he could call on me only once a week; the more he objected the more firm was I. "Why, don't you see?" I said. "That's the gist of the whole thing."

"No," he protested, "I don't see any sense in it at all, and I said so at the start. And if I had some money in my jeans, I wouldn't let you do it. I'd march you to the minister's and then—" he laughed and shook his fist at me, "*then* I'd show you who was boss."

"If I make up my mind to marry you, you're going to be boss, money or no money," said I. "I hate a woman who usurps a man's authority. But I want to make up my mind."

"And about how long is it going to take you?" Jim inquired from halfway up a stepladder. He was demolishing my cozy corner; and it seemed to me that he used unnecessary violence. But I never said a word.

"Say, Duchess," he shouted, standing there, the picture of comic perplexity, a hammer in one hand. "Are you likely to pull up stakes again before you make up your mind? It's no joke, I tell you, any way you look at it."

But at last the room was dismantled and an express wagon removed the furniture to my new abode. It was Tuesday evening when I, too, left the house, after insisting that Jim should not go downtown with me. "Good-by till Sunday," was my final word.

"I give you fair warning I'll be there Sunday," he responded, glumly, "early in the afternoon."

When I left the office at half past six on Thursday (for I had been detained), Jim was outside waiting for me. I know he caught the look of pleasure that swept

over my face at first sight of him, for it was reflected in his own; and I fear the frown I tried to muster afterward had little influence.

Slowly I walked toward him. "I told you Sunday, Jim," I said.

"You told me I could *call* Sunday," he admitted. "But there's nothing to prevent my taking a walk uptown after a hard day's work. You don't own the streets, you know. And you said yourself that a bookkeeper's job called for a lot of outdoor exercise."

"But I never could get you to act on it before," I reminded him.

"It's different now," he explained. "You claimed you were going to walk home from the office every day, and it's up to me to see if you keep your word." That made me laugh; but none the less it touched me when he said: "Say, Honey, it's awful lonesome without you."

Although Jim called but once a week, I saw him or heard from him almost daily. Either he walked home with me from business or he sent me a note or telephoned to the office, or he left at the door a box of candy for me or some posies he had picked up from some vender on the street. They were poor and few, and usually wilted before night, very different from the large boxes of flowers bearing the labels of expensive florists which for a time Paul Forsythe had sent to me. But I knew that Jim's offerings were the best he could provide—and all that mattered was the thought.

So, too, with his letters: there was in them nothing of literary charm, no felicity of phrasing, no graceful turn of thought, no keen comment on the day's affairs in the big world outside—nothing that had marked Billy's letters. But there was—what no one else had written me—the sincere, straightforward, if often slangy, language of affection. I knew he wanted me.

CHAPTER LV

MAKING UP MY MIND

IT was in the evening that I missed Jim most: the old house downtown was very still. And I found myself listening for his whistle on the stairs, his light tap on the door, his strumming on the mandólin. Indeed, Mrs. Raine herself had been apprehensive concerning the quiet of my new surroundings and the lack of young society.

"Are you sure you won't be lonesome up here all alone? Or afraid?" she asked soon after I moved in. The weather had come on cold and she had climbed up to my room with an extra blanket she thought I might need. "I find I mind the stairs late years," she confessed. "It troubles me to breathe. And Mr. Raine's so lame that I guess it's five years since he was in this room until last summer. And the workmen kept him so busy then traipsing up and down to look after them, that he won't be likely to make the journey now. But at any rate, you won't be interfered with."

I laughed. "That will be a welcome change. In a boarding house there are so many interruptions."

"Well, if it suits you, it suits us. But if there's anything you want, don't hesitate to speak. Maggie" (the chambermaid) "has been with me for years."

It was quiet, it was lonely with the Raines, but it gave me what I sought: opportunity to think.

Of marriage I thought much, not in my old way of so-called "thinking," which had amounted simply to blind acceptance of traditions, of conventions made by

man; but solemnly, with all the mind I had, with all the heart I had, I considered the relation for which marriage stood, stripping from the core of truth—so far as I could understand the truth—all the platitudinous precepts I had inherited, all the hypocrisy I had absorbed.

To me the irrevocable nature of the marriage ceremony was appalling. How, I asked myself, could any human being promise before God and man to love another human being till death parted them? How could he be sure of the other, how be sure of himself? One might undertake the minor obligations, the providing of food and drink, the keeping-up of the paraphernalia of a life together, but how could any human being *promise* to love another all his life? And without love, all the rest was meaningless: no, not meaningless; it was disgrace.

And what, after all, was love, I mused? What it was not, I was very sure: for instance, I knew that to give the name of love to what was merely riot of the blood was blasphemy: knew, too, that "respect" was not enough, nor "good will," nor "sympathy." But what "love" was I could not tell. It seemed to me that if love—the real, right thing—existed between a man and woman, it must be the result of marriage, not its harbinger.

That it did not always so result I was well aware. For nine years I had lived in the city of New York and had seen something (and in the newspapers had read much more) of the manner in which men and women rushed pell mell into matrimony, taking upon themselves the most solemn responsibilities; and then, a little later, lightly cast off those responsibilities, in order that, with different partners, they might form a new alliance, called also by the name of marriage and blessed by some "man of God!"—this alliance in its turn perhaps to be followed by more of the same sort. I was familiar with the working of the divorce mill of South Dakota and other "easy" States; and I looked upon the whole thing as a mockery.

The right way, so it seemed to me as I thought of it, then, in an earnest effort to search out the right, was to go slowly in the first place. But no matter how slowly the pair proceeded in the conventional pathway to the altar, how could a woman ever ascertain the true nature of a man, or a man ascertain the true nature of a woman, until after marriage? "Yet the most important relation of life," I said, "should be something more than a leap in the dark."

With some men I could understand that some women would have little doubt. I could easily imagine conditions in which I, too, should rejoice to intrust my whole life to the guidance of another, and with him go forward without questioning or fear. But it was not an imaginary case that confronted me: I was dealing with no hero of romance. My problem was Jim Wolcott. Was he the kind whom marriage—marriage with me, at least—would develop? Some men are steadied by responsibility, ambition sometimes comes with the need for it, often strength results from conflict. Would it be so with him?

He was twenty-three years old, a dear, clean, sunny boy; but—I looked it in the face—as weak as water. Was it true, as he had averred, that having me to work for "would make a man of him?" I was ready to do everything I could to make marriage a success. Would he do his share, once he was sure of me? In my work among the tenements I had seen instances where girls married young men of the same type, I thought, as Jim, and the marriage proved disastrous: the husband deteriorated into a shiftless, drunken creature, and the wife's life was wrecked. But I remembered, too, cases where some woman like myself—out of spirits and somewhat out of health, as well simply through loneliness and defeated capacity, had married some young man like Jim; and the marriage had been the making of them both.

The subject of "trial marriages" was on everybody's

tongue that fall; I could scarcely take up a newspaper without finding some facetious reference to it. But surface ridicule had no effect on me: I was looking for the central truth. And more and more it seemed to me that, in the case in which I found myself, some preliminary knowledge of the relation for which marriage stood, some understanding of the influence which, as his wife, I should exert on Jim's character, was indispensable to courageous, intelligent assumption of lifelong responsibilities.

I was aware that, with some people, a procedure similar to this might open the door to much that was deplorable: that, in short, it might defeat the very object which its high-souled advocates endeavored to promote. But this did not frighten me. I felt that the matter was too far-reaching, of too grave importance to the race, to be settled by any rule of thumb. I admitted the right of other people to their own convictions: in turn I claimed the same right myself. I felt that my motive was honest and my heart was pure.

For a young girl whose character was unformed, I realized this would be a dangerous experiment: but I was a woman twenty-eight years old. If ever I was to be qualified to judge what was right for me to do, it seemed to me the time was now.

Had there been any one belonging to me to whom the step I was now meditating would give pain, I might have abandoned it. I do not know, but it is safe to say that I would have hesitated longer than I did; thought of the suffering that might ensue for those who belonged to me would have complicated matters. But I had nobody. And so long as no experiment of mine involved features that interfered with the orderly arrangement of other people's lives, I felt that I was free to do with my own life as I would.

The old couple in whose house I roomed I held in high esteem. They had lived their lives—well-rounded,

normal lives—as seemed best to them. That their "best" accorded with the established order of society was part of their good fortune. My life had been warped, blunted from the start. I had tried in every way I knew to live as other people did, to have some share in the common lot. But I was outside.

And so, considering the experiment of a trial marriage unblessed by any priest, I decided that, assuming there was no disturbance in my quarter of the house, that Jim continued to go home at the usual hour, that the ordinary routine of life progressed as heretofore, it was no more concern of Mr. and Mrs. Raine's what experiment I made of marriage in their house than whether I was a meat eater or a vegetarian. There might be such circumstances connected even with one's choice of diet as to render one a nuisance to one's neighbors; but failing such circumstances it was a personal matter, of concern to no one else.

Of course, I didn't like the idea of secrecy: no woman does, I think. To do anything, no matter how innocent it may be, by stealth, is odious. I felt there ought to be some way whereby a trial marriage, entered on with such motive as I recognized in myself, could be publicly solemnized, could receive the approbation of society. But who was to be the judge of motive? Where was the court of last appeal?

Since, then, in existing conditions of society, there could be no ceremony, no outward show of sacrament, it behooved us never to lose sight of what was symbolized. In my eyes, this trial marriage was a step which I prayed would lead to a lifelong union destined to bring out the best in both of us.

For the present, there could be no home together, no children, no established place in the community—nothing of what many women marry for. But I hoped all this would follow in good time; knowing Jim so well, I had come to understand something of what life means to a

young man alone. And the sum of all my thinking was that I had only myself to give this boy: if the gift would help him on all sides of his life, I asked nothing more.

This was the conclusion that I reached by Christmas-time. Indeed, for two months, my ideas gradually clarifying, had been veering toward this point. But Jim had no suspicion. How to make him understand?

I couldn't tell him in so many words; to write was unwise as well as difficult. So far as my observation went, men—even young and thoughtless men—were much more conventional than women. I had read much, too, of men's attitude on vital questions, and through my work had heard many confidences from women who had been betrayed. And it seemed to me that, though men might defy conventions openly and persistently, they usually experienced some sense of guilt (not sufficient to deter them, but enough to make them uncomfortable at times; as if convention, just because it *was* convention, was indisputable). Moreover, they divided us women into two classes, according to whether we obeyed or disregarded the law of so-called "morality" which they laid down for us. I remembered having overheard men say, "What is weakness in man is sin in woman."

All this had no influence on my own opinion of what was right or wrong. But I resolved that there should be no experiment of the trial marriage unless Jim's attitude paralleled my own; unless he thought that it would be right for both of us; unless he believed with me that we could look the whole world in the face.

CHAPTER LVI

NEW YEAR'S EVE

I HAVE said that he called on me once a week after I moved downtown. To be sure, that did not cover all our meetings; there were frequent walks, as well as talks over the telephone, and an occasional dinner and theater. But Jim complained that only one evening call a week was "hard lines."

I found it so myself and, by the first of November, Wednesday evening as well as Sunday was set aside for him. Thanksgiving Day was his by virtue of the President's proclamation, he declared; and when Christmas and New Year's were near at hand, he announced that each holiday was to include the evening preceding it. "A fellow always spends Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve with his family." After a pause he added, "I haven't anywhere else to go."

At this reference to his homelessness, I relented. "All right," I said.

He was not slow to follow up the advantage he had gained. "And I don't see why you won't marry me right now."

"We can't get married now. Whether we ever can, depends upon yourself."

"Well, I don't see what more I can do," he argued. "Here I am as steady as a clock, don't drink a drop, and what do you think, Duchess," he put his hands in his pockets, thrust out his chest and strutted up and down the room, "I've started a bank account."

I ran to him and grabbed the lapels of his coat. "Honest, Jim?"

"Sure thing," said he. Then lifting me high in his arms, he kissed me; and laughing set me down. "And you pretend you're not mercenary."

"Oh, it's not so much the money. It's the fact that you can save."

"How much do I have to save before you'll hitch up with me? Of course, if you're waiting for me to blossom out into a millionaire, you may as well go to the convent now."

I made no reply. On the table lay a magazine containing a thoughtful review of an article that had recently appeared bearing on the question of trial marriages. The idea suddenly occurred to me to call Jim's attention to it, as a means of leading up to the experiment which, if his attitude warranted it, I was prepared to make.

I marked the article with a blue pencil and held out the magazine to him. "Take this home with you," I said. "And read the article I've marked. Read it this evening, please."

But he folded his hands behind his back. "No, thank you, Duchess. I'm onto your tricks. You're trying to get me out of here."

"Won't you, just to please me?"

He stretched himself out comfortably in the Morris chair. "I'll read it here—or you can read it to me. But I'm not going home Wednesday evening at nine o'clock—not by a long shot." And he smiled up at me as much as to say, "What are you going to do about it?"

Presently I seated myself on the arm of his chair and, tugging at a button on his coat, said, "I had a special reason for asking you to go home and read that article. Won't you?"

He drew my head down on his shoulder. "So you want me to improve my mind as well as save my money? Say, you're something fierce. You'll be ordering a

course in Sanscrit next." And he sighed. "Well, I s'pose I've got to hike uptown." But he made no move to go.

I looked at him, and then at the clock.

"What's the old article about, anyway?" said Jim.

"Read it and find out," said I. And then in a lower voice, "You promised." I rose and reached out both hands as if to pull him from the chair. He grumbled a bit, but finally consented to go home. As he stood half inside the threshold and I waited to close the door behind him, he opened the magazine I had thrust into his hand; and lazily looked for the blue pencil mark.

"Aha," he said. "I have it. H'm! Yes, Duchess, I'll read every word."

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It was New Year's Eve when Jim appeared next time at the house; and he brought back the magazine. "That's a funny notion in that article," he remarked, as he lighted a cigarette.

I began to talk lightly of other things; now that he had read the article, I shrank from any reference to it. We had planned to go to a restaurant and then downtown to hear the chimes at Old Trinity. But it was early yet.

On my way home from the office that evening I had explained to Mrs. Raine that Mr. Wolcott and I were to spend the first part of the evening in my room and intended then to join the crowds and watch the Old Year out. "So don't be frightened," I cautioned her, "if you hear us going up and down stairs later than usual. It's New Year's Eve, you know."

"Oh, we never hear anything," she had answered in her cordial way. "Mr. Wolcott is the quietest young man I ever saw."

This remark I repeated to him now; he smiled and we talked of indifferent matters for some time and he smoked at intervals. But finally, reverting to the article

in the magazine, he said, "Yes, it's a funny notion, but there might be something in it."

"There's a—a great deal in it," I answered, slowly.

"But it would be tough on the girl," said Jim, "if the fellow didn't treat her right."

"I should think—it would be—an incentive to a man. I should think—it would help him." I was trembling now and gripping the arm-rests of my chair, "help him to—to be all she wanted him to be." I don't know what was in my voice: those were the only words I spoke, but all at once the room seemed to be alive with a new significance. Jim was standing with his back to the fire, looking at me.

He started to speak, then broke off and walked over to my chair. "Dorothy," he said. But I couldn't raise my eyes.

There was a long moment of silence; then the man turned on his heel. "No," he muttered, "I couldn't take a straight girl like you——"

That roused me. "Jim," I called; and he turned to me again. "You don't understand. I'm 'straight,' as you call it, now. But I should be 'straight' afterward." Then someway—how I cannot tell—I found courage to explain, while he stood there with white face watching me, the meaning of a trial marriage—in our case—to me. "But unless it—meant the same thing—to you," I faltered at the end, "why—it—could never be. If you don't look at it as I do——"

"But I do! What you say is so." Then I felt his arms around me, his hot breath on my face. "Oh, I love you—want you—dear," he said, "on any terms."

Suddenly a dark flash of terror tore its way through me. I pushed back his face and for an instant looked straight into his eyes. "Will you be good to me?" I said. "Life has been so hard. Will you, Jim?"

"I will. Always." In his broken voice the words had all the solemnity of a marriage oath.

We talked a little more; and, as was his way, he brushed the hair back from my forehead and caressed my face. "Why, what are you crying for?" he asked gently.

"I—I—don't know." My voice stopped; he kissed the tears away and I clung to him.

"This is the last of the Old Year," said Jim. . . . And we embarked on a New Year all our own.

CHAPTER LVII

THE "TRIAL MARRIAGE."—DISILLUSIONIZED

FOR the first three months of the trial marriage there was happiness; or at least something more like happiness than I had ever known. In the office I was able to turn off more work than formerly and what had been difficult of accomplishment before was like child's play now. In my relations, too, with those whom I saw daily in the routine of business, the cordiality I manifested now was spontaneous; the sympathy for others, which grief had taught me in past years, joy intensified. I was surer of myself and, while more efficient, I was gentler, too.

All this, I take it, followed because, for the first time in my life as a mature woman, I was living somewhat as nature intended us to live. I was in better spirits, better health, had more hope for the future. I read somewhere of one who "had gone to sleep on the sea with only the unattainable horizon round about and awakened in harbor in a strange land that was warm and lovely and full of sunshine," and it seemed to me that fitted my own case.

The only cloud was the secrecy necessitated by the conditions under which we lived; that cloud, however, we were planning to dispel by being married legally in June. Jim had arranged for his vacation then, and I knew I could get away; so we were to have a honeymoon "like other folks," Jim said. "And then when we come back to little old New York, you can't send me

home at a quarter of eleven at night. This plant," and he gazed proudly round the room, "will be mine."

Truth to tell, it had not been easy at all times to persuade Jim to conform to what under the circumstances was imperative; and had I been among people who were less kindly (or more observant) than the Raines, there might have been more hazard to record. As it was, I used to tell Jim that I had to be discreet for both of us; at which, of course, he scoffed.

But we were both looking forward to the day when we should assume lifelong responsibilities: I, because I believed our experiment was proving a success; and he, with little thought of the responsibilities, I fear, but because he understood legal marriage would give him more ease and more authority. In saying this I do not mean to belittle his affection for me, or my reliance on it. I do believe that, in so far as strength of affection is compatible with weakness of character, Jim loved me; he was surely gentle and tender with me; and as I, striving to uphold my confidence in man as leader, gave way to him in almost everything, he was gay, good-humored, and appeared in the best light.

This was the condition then when, early in April, Jim told me one evening that he must purchase a new suit of clothes. At the naïveté of his remarks I smiled, and that spurred him on to a comparison of his circumstances with my own.

"Of course, it's easy enough for you to get all the glad rags you want" (this was not true: it was necessary for me to consider expenses most carefully), "but I tell you what, it's a different proposition for a chap like me that's overworked and underpaid. I ought to have had a raise New Year's, but the boss has got a grudge against me. The tight wad!" he exclaimed; then glancing at the clock, "and about this time I suppose he's feeding his face at Delmonico's." There was a pause. "Hope he chokes!" said Jim.

The next time he appeared, he announced that he had been shopping. "The way women like to shop—looking at things. Say, Duchess, there's one suit at Johnson & Davis's that's a corker—and a bargain at that. But I had to pass it up. I counted my roll of one-spots over and over to be sure some of 'em hadn't stuck together, but—nothing doing! Every blamed time I was short ten iron men." He sighed. "That suit sure did make the rest look like a fire sale, and I didn't separate myself from any coin. And now I might as well go over to Eighth Avenue and give up for one of those 'I-used-to-be-$9.67. Take-me-home-to-day-for-$7.53' outfits. I'll look as if I had just escaped from the foolish house. But what does that matter when," with a sardonic smile, "I can please you by putting a few cents in the bank?"

I laughed. "Don't be silly, Jim."

"Well," he assumed an air of injured innocence. "You're always preaching economy. But I notice you sport some high-priced togs yourself."

"I never buy what I can't pay for," I replied.

"I can pay for it all right," said Jim. "Only not till Saturday. And by then it will be gone."

There was more in the same strain. I knew what he was driving at, and in my eyes it was humiliating to us both; still I hated to have him lose the opportunity to secure a bargain (he had excellent taste and good judgment in such matters, too) for lack of the loan I could so easily supply.

"Don't talk about it any more," I put my hand over his mouth. "I'll let you have the money until Saturday." And I went to my desk and wrote him out a check for ten dollars.

He accepted it without embarrassment, merely saying: "You'll be mighty proud to walk up Riverside with that suit Sunday afternoon."

Two evenings later brought Jim in the new suit; he looked very handsome and gave me an amusing account

of his experiences buying it. "And now," he said at the close of the recital, "I'm going to take you up to ——'s," mentioning an Italian restaurant which I knew by reputation as a haunt of near-Bohemians, "and blow you to a feed."

"Why, I've been to dinner."

"It's a good thing you have," he answered, sagely. "It's not the eats that folks go there for. It's the dippy crowd of regulars and the talk and the songs—the whole shooting match. And, oh, joy, it's cheap. So prink up a bit and we'll christen the new suit."

Jim and I both liked people; we had, too, the same zest for novelty, and spent many hours in quest of quaint and inexpensive places of amusement out of the beaten track. Wherever we went, we always went alone and rarely met any one we knew; but that was no drawback: on the contrary it gave more relish to all our explorations. We were living in a world of our own that seemed to have no connection with other people's lives.

I had known before that Jim was careless about money: he himself said that he was "unfortunate." But to me heretofore carelessness (or misfortune) had not been criminal. Nevertheless the fact that he was willing to accept a loan from me in order to purchase a new suit of clothes gave me food for thought. I supposed, of course, that the first thing he would do on Saturday when he received his pay envelope would be to hurry to my house to repay the loan. In this I was mistaken: to be sure he did put in appearance early Saturday evening, but he said nothing of any indebtedness. Instead he rushed in and waved a couple of theater tickets before my eyes, and as proud as Punch announced: "We're going to a show uptown. Hustle on your hat—the new one, kid."

As usual I fell in with his plan, not even waiting to inquire what play he preferred. I made it a point to leave everything to him, to cultivate in myself the atti-

tude of depending on his judgment, of looking up to him as the head of the family.

But as the evening advanced, his silence on the subject of the loan was more and more incomprehensible. If for any reason he could not return the money now—though it seemed to me that in like case I should have moved heaven and earth rather than leave it unpaid—why did he not explain? If it was embarrassing to speak of it, that was all the more reason to my mind for plunging in at once and having it over with. But the young man at my side, silent on one subject only, talked gayly of a hundred other things and showed no trace of embarrassment; on the contrary, he fished for compliments regarding the fit of the new suit. I had avoided all reference to it in the hope of saving him mortification, but I had my trouble for my pains.

Then I began to make excuse for him: he had simply forgotten it; any minute he might think of it; his grandmother had brought him up so badly that he had no sense of values now, etc., etc. But all the same, this did not seem to me the kind of thing a manly young fellow could forget. I knew that whatever his grandmother had done or failed to do for him, he was a child no longer. He was now twenty-four years old. I looked upon him as my husband—and I was ashamed of him!

He had always been generous with me, had spent for me much more money than I wished; even now we had the best seats in the theater! But I would rather he repaid the loan, had he never spent a cent for me. It was not that I grudged him the money. That counted not at all. I would give him every cent I had if he were in need. But a loan was not a gift; and it troubled me that he could lose sight of the difference.

"Say, Duchess, you look kind o' blue to-night," said Jim, in one of the intermissions. "Don't you like the show?"

"Oh, it's well enough," I told him.

"Because if you don't, we'll beat it double quick. I'm not so all-fired stuck on it myself."

"Just as you please," said I. "It makes no difference to me."

"Well then, suppose we go up to ——'s and watch the crowd and hear the music." I agreed, and a few minutes later we were on Broadway. "The plot of that play makes me tired," Jim muttered, as we waited for a car.

At our little table in the restaurant, he again reverted to the play which, he said, was "rotten." He was trying then to strike a match, but only succeeded in breaking off the sulphur head; several fruitless efforts followed, each one deepening the scowl between his eyes.

But at last the cigarette was lighted and he could give his undivided attention to denunciation of the play. The leisurely methods of the hero (with whose wife the villain had eloped) in following up the pair, especially roused Jim's scorn. "To call that mutt a hero! Why, I'd kill a man so quick he'd never know what struck him that took you away from me!"

His tone all through the evening had been strange; and there was a reckless light in his eyes that I did not then know how to interpret.

"Well," I said, laughing a little at the absurdity of the idea, "you don't need to begin practicing just now." He gave me a quizzical look; and with the sense of not knowing what was in his mind I explained, still with an attempt at lightness: "You see, I don't know anybody else. You have never introduced me to your friends."

"Not on your life," he replied, promptly, in a tone that startled me. "Little Jimmie takes no chances."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked. His cigarette glowed between us as I leaned across the table. It was still too early for the theater crowd to pour into the restaurant; in fact, the place was almost empty. Our table was in a corner and we could talk without danger of

being overheard. "What do you mean by that?" I asked again, as Jim made no reply.

It was a long time before he spoke. "Duchess," he said at last, a little shakily, "I would no more introduce you to an attractive man until you and I have been to the minister's than I would cut off my right hand. I had hard enough work to win you, and I don't intend to lose you now."

I was so shocked by what he said that I could not speak. I only looked at him.

"Why," he exclaimed, staring at me in amazement, "I don't see what you take it that way for. You ought to feel flattered."

"Oh, Jim," I cried in a low voice, drawing in my breath, "don't you know me any better after all this time? As if 'going to the minister's' made any difference! Why, my dear, we are married now."

"No, we aren't," insisted Jim, flinging down his cigarette. "Not the way most folks look at it. Not according to the law."

"It's the spirit that counts," I reminded him, gently, "not the letter of the law. The form is nothing."

"Well, then, if it's nothing," he broke out, angrily, "why in God's name don't you go through the form with me?"

"Jim dear," I entreated, "didn't I promise to 'go through the form' in June? Didn't we agree that a wedding 'like other folks,' when we could get away for a honeymoon all decently and in order, was the right thing for us? Haven't we made all our plans?"

He nodded sulkily.

"In the face of that," I went on, my tone still as if I were pleading with a child, "I can't quite understand your attitude to-night. We're doing just as we agreed. But no marriage ceremony is going to help if you don't trust me now."

Jim was still incredulous. "You're a darn sight

more attractive than you ever were before," he said, eying me thoughtfully the while. "That's what I've done for you. And New York is full of fellows looking for a girl like you and naturally——"

"Naturally what?" I lifted my head sharply. "I don't know what you mean. I don't see what the number of evil-minded men in the city of New York has to do with me."

"Well—it's this way." He lowered his voice. "When a girl once starts in—like us, you know—she never puts an end to it. If it isn't one man, it's another all along the line."

I trembled from head to foot. "Oh," I moaned, "how can you say such things to me? How can you think them, Jim?"

"I know what I'm talking about," he assured me with a self-complacent smile. "I may be only twenty-four, but I'm a lot older and wiser in some things than you. And seeing that play to-night set me to thinking." For some moments he continued in this vein, uttering glibly phrases that stuck like thorns.

But I interrupted him with a weary gesture. "I wish you would take me home. I can't stand any more of this."

We went downtown in silence; before we reached the house Jim's mood had changed. "We mustn't quarrel, kid," he said. "It's all the fault of that bum play, anyway."

I made no reply.

"Oh, see here," he cried, halting in the shadow of some trees in front of a tall building, "I only said it to find out what you were made of, Dorothy." He tried to draw me close. "It was nothing but a joke."

"A strange subject for a joke," said I, putting my hands on his arms to push him away; then stepping to one side I waited with as good grace as I could for him to start on again.

His sidewise glance betrayed his uneasiness. "Well, I admit I said too much, and I beg your pardon. There! What more can I do? Don't be unreasonable." And he fell into step again. At the door he said nothing, but made as if to come upstairs with me.

I shook my head. "It's too late. And besides," I hesitated, as if to reconsider what I was about to say, "I don't feel to-night as if I ever wanted to see you again."

I saw his eyes turn to me in the dark and I knew that he was angry. The key was in the latch by now, and Jim paused in unfastening the door to say, sneeringly: "Oh, you'll get over your mad." He kicked at the door and handed the key back to me. "And what's more, you'll be looking for me fast enough. I know you all right." I made no response, but stepping inside the door closed it hastily and dragged myself upstairs.

CHAPTER LVIII

ON THE DEFENSIVE

A SUDDEN sense of futility overwhelmed me. This was what it came to, then, my effort to help Jim? It was thus I thought of it, as "helping Jim": for first of all it had been necessary to convince myself that I was giving, that some generous issue justified a step so at variance with all the precepts laid down for the ordering of life. Jim's statement on the way downtown that what he had said in the restaurant was "nothing but a joke" carried no conviction with it. I believed that in the restaurant, if ever, he meant what he said, but that, seeing its effect on me, he disavowed it for fear of consequences to himself.

Still, I do not think I had any feeling of regret for the course I had pursued: the consciousness of having acted after long deliberation out of a full belief in what was right for me to do never deserted me. That it had been a grievous error to assume I could be a help to Jim, I now recognized; but the question of the wisdom or folly of a deed was absolutely disconnected from its moral quality. And in every fiber of my being I felt that, no matter what Jim said or what thousands of my fellow-beings might believe, what I had done was free from taint of wrong: that I was sinless in the sight of God.

When Jim made no attempt to see me Sunday (the day following the conversation in the restaurant), I recalled his parting sneer and decided he was waiting for me to make some sign. However, when Wednesday evening came, I had some misgiving lest he might

appear as usual; accordingly, that there should be no light upstairs to indicate I was at home, I went dinnerless to bed, after asking the servant who was to be on duty at the door to say to Mr. Wolcott, in case he called, that I could not see him. Next morning the servant vouchsafed no information and I asked no questions, interpreting the silence as sufficient guarantee that Jim had not been there.

Until that illuminating conversation in the restaurant I fully expected to marry Jim in the eyes of all the world. So long as he did not drink—a proviso on which I had insisted from the first—there was nothing which I felt would justify me in casting him adrift. As I had said to him, "going through the form" meant nothing to me. In my own eyes I was his wife.

But those few words in the restaurant disclosed an attitude on vital subjects that differed radically from my own. And yet months earlier I had told him what the trial marriage meant to me, and he assured me that it meant the same to him! I recalled the circumstances of our talk on New Year's Eve, his avowal and his promises. . . . It is a very bitter thing for a woman to realize that a belief which she has held sacred, the very core of truth, was only simulated by another in furtherance of his own ends; that the chief relation of her life has been a mistake. An innocent mistake, indeed; but none the less a mistake.

On Friday of that week I left the office early and, with the object of eluding Jim, should he chance to come to meet me, started home by an unaccustomed route. Jim knew my ways so well, and the exactions of my daily work permitted so few deviations from routine, that there was little hope of long escaping an encounter if he was bent on seeing me. "But," said I, "he would never think of looking for me in this neighborhood."

With a glance at the clock in a small shop I was passing, I caught myself up sharply. Jim was still at work,

I knew; and at this rate of progress, long before he left the office I should be at home. Once there I could barricade myself, should such defense be needed, by requesting the servants not to admit him to the house. But to that I would resort only in extremities. And I smiled to think how groundless were my fears. "Very likely he has seen some one he likes better by this time."

With this thought in mind, I soon reached the house, but felt small inclination to go indoors: it was ridiculous, I said, to be trying to escape from one who was not even in pursuit; it was absurd to lose this opportunity for exercise.

So, passing my doorstep, I sauntered over to the corner where our street merged into the square; pausing there, I gazed up the long vista of Fifth Avenue. It was April, and the sweetness of spring was in the air; a soft, gray afternoon it was, with the sun appearing now and then from behind light, fleecy clouds that held no hint of rain. From the small park in the square behind me came the sound of the splashing of the fountain, the shouts of children, and the odor of spring flowers.

All this was good, but spread out in front were allurements better suited to my mood: the crowded thoroughfare offering to the view every type of face and figure, the splendor of spring toilets on parade, glimpses of smart vehicles, a profusion of shop windows, the many varied manifestations of the familiar and to me always fascinating spectacle of Fifth Avenue late in the afternoon in spring. Even the subdued roar of traffic over on Broadway was music in my ears. And I set out uptown.

CHAPTER LIX

RE-ENTER THE FORSYTHES

I HAD walked about a mile and a half, when, in a cab, at a standstill in the press of the avenue, I caught sight of somebody I knew. At the same instant she saw me, bowed, smiled, and signaled me to wait; then she told the driver to edge his way up to the curb. He succeeded in doing this while she still held me with her eager glance.

It was Mrs. Forsythe, Paul's mother. Almost seven years had passed since I saw her last, but she seemed little changed; and now, moving along to make room for me beside her, she greeted me in the old affectionate tone. "You dear child! Jump in here this minute!"

I obeyed. Mrs. Forsythe gave me a quick hug, then drew back as far as the confines of the cab allowed and looked at me. "You're just the same," she said, "only better looking!"

"Don't try to make me vain at this late day," I laughed. Indeed, there was a deal of laughter along with the shreds of explanation, the phrases of excuse, which two women who have long been separated fling out in the first moments of reunion, striving to span immediately the whole interval. Meantime the cab was drifting idly down the avenue.

"But you were going somewhere," Mrs. Forsythe interrupted herself to say. "Tell me where, and I'll set you down there in no time."

"I wasn't going anywhere in particular," I confessed. "Just out for a walk."

"Good," she cried. "Then you'll come home with me and dine. It will be a charity, for I am all alone."

"Alone?" said I.

"Only for a few days," she hastened to explain. "We arrived day before yesterday, and Paul went East last night on business."

"How is Mr. Forsythe?" I felt obliged to ask, but was conscious that my voice was hard.

"Oh, he's very well. The dear fellow's always well, only," she chuckled as if recalling some joke between the two of them which she was about to share with me, "he's getting stout. And I needn't say 'getting,' either! He's got there. If he wasn't my son I should probably call him fat. But he does like the good things of life, and," she sighed, "Paul is forty now."

"Forty!" I exclaimed. "Well, *you* don't look it, Mrs. Forsythe, any more than you did seven years ago."

"Of course you remember what a fine figure of a man Paul used to be. Well," she sighed again, "he's so heavy and middle-aged nowadays that I tell him it's cruel to expect me to go around with him. But," seriously, "his soul is just the same."

She gave me a brief account of their wanderings. "We've been in New York twice without seeing you. But each time we were here only a few days. Once I called up the office and they told me you were attending some convention in the West; and when we were here the other time I didn't have a chance to telephone. We went to Massachusetts when my sister died, and then sailed from Boston for Italy."

"You have been well yourself, I hope?"

"Haven't had one sick day," she said. All through our drive and during dinner at the huge hotel, Mrs. Forsythe was in the best of spirits; she wore a most becoming gown and, with youthful, buoyant manner full of charm, talked of many different things, touching nothing

she did not adorn until, just before I left, she asked: "Didn't you meet Rae Dillaben?" And as she asked, she was instantly transformed into a cruel old woman with glittering, unfeeling eyes. "I had her over once from Waban when we were at the Meriden."

"Oh, yes," I replied, flushing at the memory of the contretemps. "She was a tall, fine-looking girl."

"Well," said Mrs. Forsythe, "she's dead."

"Dead? Why, she was the picture of health."

The other nodded and pursed up her lips. "Nothing ailed her but disappointment—about not getting Paul. She fussed and brooded over that till they had to send her to an insane asylum. She was there two years."

"The poor girl," I cried.

"Oh, yes," murmured Mrs. Forsythe, indifferently, "it was too bad, of course. But there was no one to blame but herself."

Thus disposing of the matter, she harked back to the promise I had made earlier in the evening to dine with her next day. I was already regretting it, for Mrs. Forsythe's tone in referring to poor Rae Dillaben had frozen the current of my friendliness, made me feel ashamed to be the guest of a woman who was capable of such cold-bloodedness toward one whom her son—as I now understood—had sacrificed to his vanity. From Paul's own manner to myself in the old days I knew what she had had to fight; and as I recalled the episode at Albany a wave of pity swept over me for any woman who had hoped to marry Paul Forsythe.

"I have to be alone all day to-morrow," Mrs. Forsythe said, as I was leaving, "and it is deadly stupid. Come early, do. And can't you spend the night?"

"Oh, no, no," I protested, nervously, "that's quite impossible."

"Well, come early and stay as long as you can with me," she urged. "We haven't begun to visit yet, and I must make the most of you while I have the chance.

Paul will be back the first of the week, and I expect he'll want to see you then."

This remark seemed to demand of me something that I could not give; hastily buttoning my gloves and reassuring Mrs. Forsythe that I would dine with her next day as I had said, I made good my escape. It was not yet nine o'clock, the necessity of going home alone having given me a good excuse to leave the hotel at an early hour.

On the way home I pondered what Mrs. Forsythe had told me of Rae Dillaben, and my scorn of Paul increased. "At any rate, Jim's not so vile as that," I said. "His faults, the worst of them, are due to ignorance." And I thought more tenderly of Jim than for a week before.

Forsythe's cold-bloodedness, the calm, calculating way in which he helped himself (wherever it was possible) to what appealed to him for the amusement of an idle hour, his pretense of devoting himself to his mother when I knew he only used her as a cloak to shield him in his selfishness—all this, with the near prospect of seeing him again who had tried to work me harm, inclined my heart to Jim. Paul's sophistry, his evasiveness, made the other's straight-from-the-shoulder talk seem less intolerable.

It was a Frenchman who declared, "A woman forgives everything but the fact that you do not covet her." However that may be, it surely cannot be denied that the fact that a man does covet us—that so far as he is capable of love, he loves us and wants to marry us—excuses much that would otherwise be inexcusable. And of course, my own tenderness for Jim, our long friendship, and particularly the last three months, pleaded for him now. I couldn't forget the cruel words he had spoken in the restaurant; but I did permit myself to hope that I could make him see how unjust they were, could make him change his attitude. I knew I was the stronger of

us two, and I felt the strong must bear the burdens of the weak; if he would only do his best, would cast off prejudice and trust me as I trusted him, the plans for the June wedding need not be abandoned after all.

At this there came over me again the longing for a settled, ordered existence "like other folks," for a place however humble in the family life of the community, for the dignity that marriage gave with its implication of sanity, poise, experience.

"Not married yet?" Mrs. Forsythe had said. "Look out, my dear, or you'll be an old maid and take to traveling round with a cat or a canary bird."

This cut all the deeper because it was offered as a joke; and yet, had Mrs. Forsythe known of my experiment of the trial marriage, I felt that her only change of attitude would be that, instead of despising me for inexperience and ignorance, she would despise me for having dispelled the ignorance. "It's a queer world," I sighed. "But Jim is more of a man to-day than Paul Forsythe with all his advantages ever was or ever will be."

Thus do the vicissitudes of life influence our moods; a chance meeting with a woman whom I had not seen for years, the probability of soon encountering her son, a few words concerning marriage—this with my own inherent hatred of the furtiveness of the last three months turned the tide of feeling back to Jim. In the rebound, it seemed to me I was ready to marry him at once and trust to the future to make things right. It was a sad mistake, I told myself, to try to live differently from other people, even for the short period of time which I had set apart as a probationary interval.

The mere fact of observing the conventions, the emptiness (to me) of going through the form of marriage, would be full of significance for Jim. Why defer it, then? He had kept faith with me, I believed, about abstaining from intoxicants: what more thus far could I ask? The other—to bring him to the point of repudia-

ting the cruel statements he had made, of casting off unjust suspicions, to effect the change of attitude which I so much desired—would be a slow process: I might help it on by marrying him now. If so, why hesitate? At all events, we could not continue as we were.

CHAPTER LX

"DRUNK AS A LORD"

BY the time I reached the house I had come to this conclusion. There was nobody in sight when I opened the front door. Sometimes I met one of the servants in the hall and often, on my way upstairs, Mr. or Mrs. Raine called to me from the library and I stopped to chat with them. But to-night there was no sound, no sight of any one.

As I gained the fourth floor and turned at the top of the long flight of stairs to go to my own room, a streak of light underneath my door startled me. But only for an instant. "Maggie must have lighted the gas when she brought up the ice water," I thought.

Unconcernedly I turned the knob to enter, but on the threshold started back. There was Jim, his face flushed and angry, standing with arms akimbo in the middle of the room.

"Early to-night, aren't you?" he sneered.

I stood for a moment with my hand still on the knob, looking intently into his face; then I closed the door behind me and leaned against it for support.

"I say," he repeated, "you're early to-night, for *you*."

Something in his appearance suggested that he had been drinking, that he had not kept faith with me. But with an effort to keep all sense of this out of my voice I said: "On the contrary, I'm late. I met a friend and went to dinner."

"I suppose you 'met-a-friend-and-went-to-dinner,'" he mimicked, "Wednesday when you stayed out all night."

"Jim," I said faintly, "what do you mean?"

He caught my wrist and drew me to him. "See here now, you can't pull the wool over my eyes. I waited for you out there on the corner Wednesday night till two o'clock. And then—then I went to a joint uptown and —and drank your health, you—you— Drunk as a lord, I was." He laughed as a man laughs who is beside himself with rage; and he struck me.

With the suddenness of the blow, I reeled. But it was nothing compared with the scourging of outrageous words which fell upon me. At first I couldn't speak; I couldn't do anything but cringe away from him. But by and by, when he paused for breath, I came close and plucked at his coat-sleeve.

"Listen, Jim, a minute," I implored. "All that time I was sound asleep up here in this room. Don't you see that such spying on me is a shame to both of us? I've always been frank and above-board with you, Jim."

He darted a suspicious glance at me. "How did you get home Wednesday, I should like to know?" But giving me no chance to make reply, he continued excitedly: "I stopped at the office for you, but they told me you had gone; then I walked through this street looking for a light up here. I thought perhaps you were still mad and wouldn't see me if I asked for you downstairs. By and by I went over to the restaurant. You weren't there, and the cashier said you hadn't been there, so I came back to this corner and beat it up and down the block on my bicycle till two o'clock. And there was no sign of you. Now, what I want to know," he raised his voice and assumed a threatening attitude, "is where you had your dinner? When did you come home?"

This was no time, I realized, to show resentment of

his insolence; the sickening need of having to conciliate was becoming plainer with every word he said. He had been drinking, he was in my room, at night. Someway I must get him out of the house.

"I didn't have any dinner, Wednesday," I told him very quietly. "I left the office earlier than usual, came straight home and went to bed."

He gave me a long, searching gaze which I met unflinchingly. "You may be telling me the truth," he said, "and then again you may be fooling me. But this much is sure. I'll never wait out there on the corner another time. I'll come upstairs and find out for myself whether the dark is nothing but a bluff. And," setting his jaw in sullen determination, "I'll tell you something else. I'm going to stay here to-night."

At the horror, the disgust his words inspired, I forgot the diplomacy I had resolved to use. Instinctively I drew back and my eyes flashed scorn.

"None of your high-and-mighty airs with me," he warned. "You're always saying we are married. Well," breaking off into a laugh, "I guess a husband has some rights."

Again he caught my wrist, as if to draw me to him; with a spring of terror, I recoiled, trying to pull my wrist from his hold. But he followed me, his face close to mine. On we went, step by step, till I was in a corner of the room with my back against the wall; then with the air of having got me where he wanted me at last, he roughly tipped my chin back and kissed me many times.

The fumes of his whisky-laden breath made me faint; but infinitely worse was the feeling of disgrace that now swept over me. In all the caresses of the past three months I had never been ashamed. He was my husband then: now all was changed. These kisses were an insult; and I hated both of us.

That I made no response angered Jim. "You little

devil, what are you so cold-blooded for? Mad still? You won't be when I get through with you." He lifted me in his arms and looked straight into my eyes.

Suddenly I saw that, if I meant to ward off worse disgrace, I must make some pretense of passion now; resort to stratagem I despised, but, in the desperate case in which I found myself, there was no other way.

Sooner than it takes to tell it, I wound both arms around his neck and kissed him as if of my own free will, kissed him till this strange creature of whom I had been afraid was transformed into the old, gentle Jim.

"Ah," he murmured, "that's better, Dorothy."

"Jim," I whispered, pushing him away and forcing a smile as I looked at him, "let me go a minute."

"What for?"

I brushed my hand over my eyes. "I'll tell you by and by."

With all his old good nature, he released me instantly, but followed me across the room. "Sit down over there," I said, motioning to the rocking chair on the other side of the table in the center of the room. Promptly he complied with the request, still eying me to find out what I meant. I sat facing him.

"When you're good," said Jim, "I'll do anything for you. What have you got up your sleeve, anyway?"

"And who is it accuses me of curiosity?" I laughed? "See, it's early, Jim." I pointed to the clock; then disclosed the plan which had been revealed to me as the one means of getting him to leave the house quietly. "I visited so much at dinner with the friend I met uptown that I didn't eat anything to speak of. Won't the kind gentleman take the poor girl out some place and give her a sandwich?"

"Sure," said he. "Where do you want to go?"

"Anywhere that's near. And I'll—tell you in the restaurant."

"All right," he agreed. "Only," with a shrewd

glance at me, "remember that I'm coming home with you afterward—up here, I mean."

This I pretended not to hear, starting up to get my coat; as I passed his chair, he caught my hand. But I put him off with a fleeting caress.

He gave a long sigh, then, with a knowing smile exclaimed: "Duchess, I can read you like a book. You've missed me all this week." But I said not a word.

As he went downstairs, I thought with a throb of joy, "This is the last time while I live here that he will ever be inside this house." But it wasn't unmixed joy: there was sorrow, too, for the failure of our experiment, grief that Jim had proved so unworthy of respect; and scorn for myself that it was necessary to employ a ruse like this to get him from the house; shame that I had kissed him only that I might more easily bend him to my will.

"But there was no other way," I pleaded in excuse. "He would have made a scene. I should have had to summon help and then—then—he would have said—I don't know what."

As this flashed across my mind, I saw, as in a sudden glare of light, how false had been my belief that this matter concerned no one but Jim and me. No one? Why, it concerned the people in whose house I lived!

"But it needn't," self-justification urged, "if Jim had been different. If he had been high-minded, manly, dependable, all would have worked out well." If—if—if! Everywhere I turned, an "if" confronted me. And through the fire of shame that consumed my vanity, burned this truth: that one can never tell beforehand, when one sets out to disregard conventions that have been established for the welfare of society, what conditions may arise that will jeopardize or trespass on the rights of others. No one of us lives to himself alone.

I had hoped the trial marriage would be a help to Jim: instead, it seemed to have brought out the very worst in him. And I now saw that, when one is ready

to give all to another, to sacrifice society to any motive however honest in itself, one can never know whether the gift is what the other needs. As for me, now that our experiment had failed, I would take up life again in the old beaten track. But how to make Jim understand that this was the end?

CHAPTER LXI

"I WON'T GIVE YOU UP"

ON the sidewalk in front of the house I gazed up at Jim with terrified foreboding: his conduct of late had been such a surprise to me that every shred of my confidence in him was gone. What I was about to say would anger him, I knew; and I dared not risk the telling in a restaurant. If so he would probably make a scene, would embarrass me and disturb other people, too. (And yet I had thought that our relations concerned no one but ourselves!) All this rushed through my mind in the instant that I stood there gazing up at him. "Suppose we don't go to any restaurant," I said.

"Don't know your own mind very long together, do you?" He paused, waiting for me to indicate the next move. "You were howling for a sandwich, last I heard."

I blushed. "Never mind it now. Let's go over to the park."

By this I meant the small park in the square near by; however, when we reached the park, the benches were all occupied and we set out for Fifth Avenue. This thoroughfare in our section of the town was as a rule almost deserted at this time of night: so we found it now. Eager to have the ordeal of the conversation over with as soon as possible, I began at once.

"There's one thing I'm ashamed of. I didn't see any way except to tell you what I did. But I've been deceiving you to-night."

He turned to me quickly, almost triumphantly. "Then it *wasn't* a woman that you went to dinner with?

Well, you didn't fool me very much. I suspected all along and——"

"Of course it was a woman," I burst out, "and I'm going to dine with her to-morrow, too. No, the only deception was in kissing you upstairs and letting you believe I consented to your plan: in pretending I wanted something to eat, when my only object was to get you out of the house. And Jim," I said very solemnly, "you're never coming back. Everything is over now."

"Why, what have I done?" he cried, blankly. "You don't mean to say you've got a chip on your shoulder yet because of a little joking on my part when we saw that bum play the other night? I'm surprised at you," and he tried to put his arm around me.

But I edged away from him. "I haven't had a chip on my shoulder and I don't want any hard words now. Just because of what has been between us, I—I—why, can't you see I don't want to quarrel with you, Jim?"

"Well, then," he threw out his hands, "what in God's name do you want?"

"Only to say good-by quietly once for all."

He broke into a laugh. "H'm! You're a cool one, I must say."

"Jim," I began again, "the trial marriage that I thought was right has turned out all wrong."

"But what have I done?" he cried. "Just tell me."

I came to a dead halt and laid one hand on his sleeve. "It's you, Jim," I said. "Your character, your attitude, everything. What's the use of going into it?"

An ugly look came into his eyes and the muscles of his mouth tightened. We were passing an electric light; I shall never forget the expression of his face. "You're tired of me, that's what it is," he said. "Now do you want me to tell you what kind of women get tired of a man that easy?"

"Oh, Jim, please," I begged.

"'Please' what?" he sneered. "Do you think you

can throw me down without a word and get away with it? Not on your life! Here I haven't even so much as looked at any other girl. You know," more tenderly, "I've always been true to you."

"If you please, Jim," I said faintly, "don't. I've never asked questions. I've just trusted you."

"Well, there you are," he taunted me. "When I pin you down to facts, you haven't a word to say."

"Oh, yes, I have," said I. "But I hoped I needn't say it. First of all you have not kept faith with me about not drinking."

He raised his right hand. "I swear to God I haven't touched a drop this year."

"Why, Jim," I gasped. "You said yourself that last Wednesday night you were as drunk as a lord. And you blamed it on me."

"I tell you you're dreaming," he shouted in a rage. "I'm not fool enough to blab about a thing like that."

"You were angry, Jim. You didn't know what you said. And your breath—your behavior—everything. But what's the use of talking any more? I was mistaken. And now I have found out my mistake—that's all."

"No, it isn't all. You're mine and I'm not going to give you up without a fight. If you don't marry me," he hissed, "I'll tell folks you're my mistress now."

I looked him straight in the eye. "You can't frighten me like that. In the first place no one would believe you. But vastly more important than what any one thinks of me is what I know myself. Nothing that any one can say—not if all the world believed you—can change my own conviction that I have done nothing of which to be ashamed. *But,*" I hastened to add, "it would be disgrace to keep on with you now that I understand you, Jim. And I have come to see that I was mistaken, too, in thinking that any two people, even if both of them mean right, can live to themselves alone. Each

individual is part of the community and for the sake of others——''

But he wouldn't let me finish. ''All that cuts no ice with me,'' he said with an impatient gesture. ''I want you and I don't care how I get you.'' Then his mood changed and he pleaded instead of threatening me. But I made no reply.

In the progress of our talk, we had turned south some time since; now we were at the corner of my street. ''Jim,'' said I, ''I'm going home. Good-night—and good-by.''

''I'm going to the door,'' he muttered. ''I never left a girl on a street corner yet.'' We walked in silence to the house; at the foot of the steps I paused; Jim reached out for my latchkey.

''No,'' said I, and waited for him to go. But he stood motionless, with one hand on my arm.

''This is not good-by,'' he warned me. ''I won't give you up.''

Moments passed and still he stood there looking at me, with a firm grip on my arm. Across the street was a policeman idly pacing up and down; I glanced in his direction and said shamefacedly: ''You aren't going to make me appeal to him, are you, Jim?''

At these words Jim turned on his heel. And I entered the house alone.

CHAPTER LXII

AWHEEL AND ON FOOT

NEXT morning the servant who had been on duty at the door on Friday evening said to me as I was going out to breakfast: "You wasn't in when Mr. Wolcott called last night. But he said you was expectin' him an' he would go upstairs an' wait. So I let him. Was it all right, Miss Baldwin?"

"Never mind this time, George," said I. "But hereafter please remember nobody is to go up to my room unless I am there and tell you so. And as for Mr. Wolcott," I was conscious of the alertness of George's attitude as I spoke the name, "if he calls again, please say that I am not at home. Don't let him into the house under any circumstances."

George nodded. "All right, miss," he said.

It was humiliating to be obliged to say this to a servant, but in view of Jim's disposition to make trouble for me, I dared not run the risk of finding him in my room again. But I was sick with shame and fear.

However, as the day wore on, personal anxieties vanished for the time in the press of routine work, and, when I left the office, the thought of the dinner engagement with Mrs. Forsythe was a distinct relief; for one evening I should be in a different atmosphere with no time to think of my own affairs. Just to be with some one who did not know of Jim's existence would be in itself a rest.

Mrs. Forsythe I found brilliantly polished and uphol-

stered as a result of recent visits from the manicure and the hairdresser; the latter, indeed, I met in the hallway of the suite, taking a last look at the marcelled monument that testified to her skill.

"I hope it will last till Paul gets back," my hostess said, a little anxiously, when I complimented her on her coiffure. "He always likes to see me in the latest style."

The mother's chief dinner topic was her son. Last evening our talk had been so disconnected, we shifted so rapidly from one quarter to another of the globe in the attempt to touch on all her travels, that Mrs. Forsythe's maternal pride was, so to speak, hidden under a bushel of other interests. But now it emerged triumphant!

I have no wish to seem to make light of her very natural sentiment. To her what she said was truth: and not by the flicker of an eyelash would I have wounded her. But with my own knowledge—knowledge that had cost me dear—of the real character of her son, her words were meaningless, save as revelation of the distance I had traveled in the past seven years.

We were half through dinner, when Mrs. Forsythe, who sat facing the dining-room door, suddenly looked up with an exclamation of delight. "Paul," she cried.

Then I heard behind my back a voice I should have known anywhere on earth: "Got through sooner than I expected and thought I'd give you a surprise."

"And I have a surprise for *you*," she said, indicating me. "See who's here."

The man halted at my side. "Why, Dorothy Baldwin," it was the same caressing intonation, "is this really you?"

I acknowledged that it was, as I greeted him; and presently the three of us, to all appearances spanning easily the long interval of absence, fell into our old-time manner of gayety. Mrs. Forsythe and I delayed our dinner till Paul caught up with us. But he made short

work of it, explaining that a man named Fletcher claimed everybody ate too much, and answering his mother's questions about his journey, all in the same breath.

She herself was the picture of happiness and benevolence; it seemed impossible this was the same woman who only yesterday spoke so cruelly of poor Rae Dillaben. And I had never seen her handsomer; the unexpected arrival of her son was evidently the last touch needed to set off the effectiveness of her coiffure. The outward and visible sign of the hairdresser's skill Paul regarded with pretended awe.

"So the wild waves said 'Marcel' to-day?" he teased. "Expecting somebody besides Dorothy this evening?" And then he turned to me. "Mother gets younger and more frivolous each year. I'm in constant fear she will elope. She always did fascinate. But now that she ondulates—and straight-fronts—and new-thoughts—and all the rest of it, she's a heavy responsibility."

"Well, you're heavier yourself," I said the first thing that came into my head, "than you were seven years ago."

Laughing, he raised a warning hand. "Tread lightly! But speaking of mother now," he returned to the attack with gusto, "she's the sylph of the family! Do you wonder that old codgers and young whippersnappers, too, are making up to me? Why, Dorothy, we have more invitations than we know what to do with!"

"We always had," his mother interposed, "when you were on the ground."

"Yes," he jeered. "But it's not debutantes' mammas inviting us yachting any more, nor young widows trying to inveigle us into bridge. It's widowers that are taking notice now. Why, they fight among themselves for the chance of engaging me in conversation. And I observe," he winked at me, "they're particularly attentive when my parent is along. I always let them know

she *is* my parent, for fear they'll take me for her father, Dorothy."

In appearance Paul Forsythe was certainly much changed. Or was it that I saw him now through different eyes? There was, of course, no grain of truth in the absurd vision which he conjured up for our amusement, of a son who looked older than the mother: that was only an ancient joke of his, refurbished for the requirements of to-day. It used to be his serio-comic boast that strangers thought them a newly married pair, and that every good-looking man they met was trying to alienate the affections of the bride.

The joke I recognized, as I did everything else he said. His point of view on all the subjects we discussed in the dining-room and later in their suite upstairs I could predicate in advance; even the words that he would choose, the very accents of his voice, I knew before he spoke. But in the outward appearance of this fat, pompous man of forty, there was little trace of Apollo, the sun god, whom I worshiped at the sea-shore; little resemblance to the Paul Forsythe from whom I fled at Albany.

The episode at Albany all the evening tingled through my consciousness; and I felt that he was thinking of it, too. It was easy enough to disregard it in the presence of another, but I dreaded the silence should we be alone; and, foreseeing that in the case of his mother's guest he could not well escape escort duty, I resolved to start home at an early hour and for the sake of both of us travel downtown by the shortest route. Mrs. Forsythe accompanied us to the elevator. An instant later we were out of the hotel.

Then came my first surprise. "It's a glorious evening, Dorothy," Paul remarked. "Suppose we walk to your house."

"As you please," said I; and we started down the avenue.

"It's plain to see," he eyed me approvingly, "that you've kept up the exercises I recommended years ago. You were such a thin, anemic little girl when I met you first—and *now*," he paused, as if for fitting words. This made no impression. I knew perfectly well that I was just the average, ordinary woman, who by no chance could ever be a beauty.

A little hurriedly I replied, glad to render gratitude where gratitude was due: "I have always been thankful to Mrs. Forsythe and you for opening my eyes to some of the defects that could be remedied. But you must see many changes in New York since you were here before. This building, for instance," referring to a sky-scraper we were passing at the time, which was one of the landmarks of the new metropolis. And I launched out into an exposé of my architectural ignorance that I hoped would last for a good part of the journey home.

He listened courteously till I came to a full stop; then he announced—as if he were stating something of grave importance—"But of all the changes, the most gratifying is in yourself. You have developed just as I hoped you would—in body and in mind."

I strove in vain to stem the tide of compliment. I wanted to say, "My 'development'—as you call it—hasn't amounted to much, if I can't estimate at its proper value such flubdub as your talk." But, of course, I didn't say it: I only tried to walk faster.

When we neared the house, he asked: "What evenings are you at home, Dorothy?"

At this I determined to show my attitude so plainly he could not misunderstand. I waited a moment before answering. "Paul," I said as gently as I could and yet firmly, too, "I'm not at home at any time—to you."

He gave no sign that he had heard; but with all the ease, the amplitude of manner that implied confidence in his own ability to deal effectively with any situation

which might arise, he steered the conversation smoothly into another channel, calling my attention, as we turned into the side street I had mentioned as our destination, to a bicycle which, propelled by a young man, was visible halfway down the block.

"I thought the fashion of bicycling had died out here," he said.

"The fashion has, I believe. The bicycle is only a convenience now." Instinctively I halted and a sigh escaped me. The young man on the wheel was Jim.

"You're tired," Paul declared. "I've made you walk too far."

"Not at all," I said, with an effort to quicken our pace. My one thought was to get rid of Paul and into the house myself before Jim turned.

But Paul was plainly in no haste. At the foot of the steps, when my manner made it clear that he was not to open the front door for me, nor even ring the bell, he tarried for some leisurely leave-taking of which I did not hear one word; nor on the asphalt of the street could I hear the bicycle. And Paul's figure, towering in front of me, interfered with my keeping an eye on Jim, who by now, I feared, had reached the corner of Sixth Avenue and started back again. "Good-night," I said to Paul abruptly.

"Are you ill?" he cried.

"No—no," I stammered. And then again, "Good-night." He raised his hat and walked rapidly away in the direction of Fifth Avenue. The Raines's house was near the corner.

Halfway up the steps, I glanced down the block in the direction of Sixth Avenue, and saw Jim darting toward me on his wheel. I stumbled then and, as I picked myself up and fumbled for the latchkey, heard the sound of the wheel being thrust against one of the posts at the bottom of the balustrade. Next I felt a clutch upon my arm.

"So that's the lady friend you go to dinner with?" sneered Jim. "I suspected it."

"No, that's her son who arrived unexpectedly tonight."

"A moment more and I'd have told him to leave my girl alone."

Steadily, coldly, I gazed at Jim. I knew that he could easily have confronted Paul, had that been his wish; he could soon overtake him now, were he so inclined. But Jim's was not the caliber that *does:* I saw that to the end he would take it out in talking, bullying a woman, but fighting shy of men.

With this discovery all my fear of him was gone. Instead of being at his mercy, I was in command. "Jim," I said very quietly, my eyes fixed on his, "unless you keep away from me of your own accord, I shall invoke protection. It will be humiliating for us both. But I've had enough of this. Now go."

Without a word he went.

CHAPTER LXIII

JIM'S DEATH—PAUL'S OFFER

AFTER that he did not seek a personal interview; sometimes I saw him on his bicycle in our street or near the office, but he made no attempt to speak to me. I heard of him, however, through a woman who still boarded in the West Seventy —— Street house and reported that he was drinking heavily. "We hear him coming in at all hours," she declared. "How he keeps his job is a surprise to us. My husband has a cousin who used to know Jim's father. It seems," she lowered her voice, "it's in the blood. The father drank himself to death, so my husband's cousin says, when he was about Jim's age. Isn't it a pity? Jim's such a dear boy when he is himself."

Then letters began to come from him: letters threatening, pleading, reviling, according to his mood. I answered none of them until, about the first of June, a more abusive letter came than any that had preceded it. To this I replied briefly that in future any letter would be returned unopened; and I begged him, for the sake of both of us, not to write again.

It was ten days later that I was summoned to the —— police station. Months before Jim had written on a card of mine his name and address, with the request that he be notified in case of accident to me; this card he made me promise to carry everywhere. At the same time he made out another in like fashion for himself, requesting any one who found it to notify me if he met with accident.

I remember he was very gay the evening he made out the two cards. "I'm going to wear mine next my heart, Duchess," he said, and laughed as he said it and kissed me. "You'll be sure to hear of it if the good die young."

My card I destroyed when I broke off with him: his he kept, for it was through information which the card conveyed that I was summoned to the police station where Jim's dead body lay. They told me that on Eighth Avenue, on his bicycle, he had attempted to pass a moving van as a cable car approached at high speed. His wheel struck the tracks, slipped from under him, and he was thrown directly in front of the car; they said he was under the influence of liquor at the time.

I did what there was to do and, following his body to the grave three days later in the near-by village which had been the only home he knew, recalled the words of Theodore Prime: "When a thing like that is in the blood, nothing on earth can keep a fellow from it." Jim was the last of his line; through him, at least, the curse had not been handed down.

When I came back to the city, the Forsythes had gone away, but all through the spring I had seen much of them both. After the Saturday evening when I left Paul so abruptly at the foot of the Raines's front steps, I did not expect—nor did I wish—another sight of him. But, to my amazement, he ignored rebuff. Of course, he did not put in an appearance at the house; but I was forever meeting him, or he would overtake me and make excuse to walk with me, "as we are going the same way." Once in awhile, he would send me a new book or a box of flowers.

Mrs. Forsythe showered invitations on me, and in such form I could not well decline: for instance, about the time of day when she knew I would be going home, she sometimes drove down to the office and begged me as the greatest favor in the world to go with her to help

her choose a hat. "I've been there twice already," she would say, "in order to save your time. I've narrowed the possibilities down to three. But I can't decide alone." Or she would request "the pleasure of my company and the benefit of my advice" (Paul came naturally by his tendency to flattery) in buying a present for her niece, whom she was soon to visit; or it would be some other service for which I was the only friend available.

Later there was dinner; sometimes the theater. Occasionally, in Paul's absence, she and I would go alone, but as a rule he accompanied us; and that meant, of course, that the end of the evening he went home with me. Never after that first evening did he ask if he might call, nor offer to unlock the door. He always said good-night very formally at the foot of the front steps and spoke no word of seeing me again. But as a rule we met several times a week. This puzzled me, for I judged that he was not the man knowingly to waste his time. "But surely," I said, "after failing so disastrously seven years ago, he cannot now expect success."

However, I decided he was quite old enough to take care of himself! If he chose to waste his time and money as he was now wasting them, why—he had plenty of both to spare; and so long as he always included his mother in the expeditions he proposed, I saw no reason to decline. While I didn't care for him at all, I admired much in his mother and enjoyed the theater. Of course, I should never have allowed a poor man, in whom I had no interest, to spend so much money for me in theater tickets, but in Mrs. Forsythe's company I had no hesitation whatever in accepting from her son, who had inherited a fortune, who had never done a day's work in his life, a share of what he offered to his mother and to me.

That it wouldn't last long, anyway, I was confident. Mrs. Forsythe and Paul were confirmed globe-trotters, and any day they might set out again for another absence

of seven years; in the meantime I resolved to make the most of such diversion as they put in my way. It helped to banish for awhile the haunting dread of Jim, to offset in some degree the anguish that Jim's letters caused. Accordingly I took the gifts the gods provided and asked no questions.

But as I have said, on my return from Jim's funeral, mother and son were gone. From Massachusetts, where they were now visiting relatives, Mrs. Forsythe sent me a note. And presently Paul wrote.

A servant handed me the letter as I came home from dinner and in the lower hall beneath the chandelier I paused an instant to glance at the handwriting on the envelope. To recognize Paul's curves and flourishes was a disappointment; I had hoped to hear from the dressmaker that night.

On the stairs I chanced to drop the letter and, stooping carelessly to pick it up, smiled to think how the mere fact that I could let it fall typified the change in me since I last received a letter from him. Then I had tucked it in my bodice safe from harm, and at night laid it underneath the pillow on my bed. Now the arrival of the letter was a disappointing item in the day's routine.

"My dear Dorothy," he wrote, "when you gave me to understand at our first meeting this spring that you preferred not to see me alone, I knew it was because of the episode so long ago at Albany. But I did not blame you, either for your part in that episode—even for the light in which you put me with the hotel people at that time—nor for the position that you took this spring. *From your point of view* you acted wisely. And without saying so in words I have tried to let you see that I respected your preference.

"But now words are necessary. I am about to change my way of life. I am laying plans—and have begun the execution of them in part—to carry on real estate operations on an extensive scale. As you know, I

have myself large holdings in New York realty, and I feel that they demand my presence there. My circle of social and business friends widens rapidly in any community where I let my personality be felt. And I have concluded it is high time for me to 'get into the game' of building up the fortune which my father left.

"This is not all. I am weary of roaming up and down the earth: I want a settled home with a young woman who is able to share its responsibilities. In my judgment, Dorothy, you have fully proved your ability to fill the many positions and meet the many demands which my broadening life will make."

And then—there was a paragraph of compliment, some reference to his mother's liking for me, a summing-up, so to speak, of what he considered my qualifications for the job—Paul Forsythe asked me to be his wife.

I laid the letter down and, to tell the truth, I laughed. No matter in what terms the proposal had been couched, there could have been but one reply; yet, had there been in all he wrote one word of affection that rang true—indeed, had there been one statement that commanded my respect—I could not have laughed. It was the cold-bloodedness, the pomposity, the consummate egotism of this man that impressed me as I sat there musing on the changes wrought by the whirligig of time; then I roused myself and despatched a very proper note declining the honor he offered me. And that was the end of my acquaintance with Paul Forsythe.

CHAPTER LXIV

CONCLUSION

IT was the end of my thinking of him, too. But the memory of Jim was always with me. I do not think I placed any halo on the dead. I knew that I could not have saved him. But the sense of futility was heavy at the first: by and by what had weighed upon me as love's labor lost appeared as something that was to be, something that had of right its own place in my life; but ended now, it rested with myself to change it from a dead weight that hindered me into a stepping-stone whereby I might reach (and, reaching, succor) lives hitherto beyond my ken.

If I know myself, I did endeavor so to change it; and the next two years, I think, were marked by more activity for others, by more forgetfulness of self than I had shown before. Outwardly conditions were unchanged: I continued in the work downtown and still lived with the Raines in their comfortable but silent house.

It was the same dreary round that thousands of New York business women know: toiling all day long as women were not meant to toil; often too weary at night for the lonely dinner in the restaurant; trying to live worthily; fighting always—always the longing for home, children, companionship. It isn't the work, it isn't the struggle: it is the unnatural quality of both! In short, I was like other women, the mute thousands who strive to make the best of the abnormal conditions in which, before they understood the conditions or themselves, they found means of a livelihood; and who now—the compe-

tition fiercer every year—are too old, too discouraged or too firmly established in New York to risk the hazard of new fortunes in unfamiliar fields.

But inwardly there was a difference from the old days: of course, I was unhappy, desolate. No woman thus placed can be otherwise. But there was less thinking of myself, less haggling of defeated will. For the past I had no regret, save that, when nineteen years of age, I came to live in New York City: but now for weal or woe, I was established there and I knew no way to change. So far as possible, I dismissed the matter of the personal equation at that point.

The spring following my thirty-first birthday, the youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Raine, who was the wife of a physician in California, visited her parents. She was only six months my senior, and we were together much; indeed, the five weeks she spent with us before her husband, Dr. Nowles, arrived, saw the beginning of a friendship that has known no wavering. And Dr. Nowles's arrival, instead of weakening the bond of sympathy, strengthened it by bringing me another friend. The two of them have the same place in my heart.

They had planned, before Mrs. Nowles left California, a three months' European trip to supplement the journey East. But now Dr. Nowles broke the news that, because of heavy obligations devolving on the physician to whom he expected to intrust his patients this summer, he was forced at the last minute to cut short his vacation; he said it did not seem worth while to cross the ocean now. But Mrs. Nowles was opposed to abandoning the plan; she made her husband promise—so she told me afterward—that if she could persuade me to take a holiday abroad with her, he would go over with us, returning when he must and leaving us to follow by ourselves.

When Mrs. Nowles first broached this to me, it seemed like a dream. I had never been abroad and the obstacles looked insurmountable; however, she swept

them all away, though she agreed to every stipulation I was obliged to make. I could have but a short vacation at the most: Mrs. Nowles claimed that suited her; furthermore, she attended to all details for me, and almost before I knew it I found myself with Dr. and Mrs. Nowles on board a transatlantic liner bound for Liverpool.

The day we sailed I observed, among the throng of passengers on deck, a man whom I should have noticed anywhere; he was with a handsome woman whom I heard a stewardess address as "Mrs. Aylwardson." Presently, in my hearing, some one called the man "Mr. Aylwardson." I saw them also in the saloon at dinner, a long way from where I sat. The second day Mrs. Aylwardson did not appear on deck, but I then noticed for the first time, with the man, a lad of sixteen who called him "father." Next morning, neither the woman nor the boy was in evidence. Indeed, the majority of the ship's passengers remained below from that time on: we had heavy weather, high seas and head winds all the way across.

One morning early in the voyage, somebody called out to Mr. Aylwardson, as he paced the deck alone: "How's your family?"

"Mrs. Aylwardson is very unhappy, thank you," was the reply. "My brother is worse off. And the boy—" His gesture implied the inadequacy of words.

It was not long after this that Dr. Nowles, who had met Mr. Aylwardson in the smoking-room, presented him to Mrs. Nowles and me. For the rest of the voyage the four of us were almost inseparable on deck; the men discovered friends in common in some quarter of the earth and shared many interests. We were all good sailors: as for me, my spirits rose with the fury of the storm. Just to be there in such congenial company and, without responsibility for anything, watch old ocean kick up its heels, was such delight that I grudged each day that brought us nearer Liverpool.

Acquaintances progress rapidly at sea; and after five days, it seemed to me I had known Mr. Aylwardson all my life. But first impressions, too, are lasting. At the start I had inferred that the Mrs. Aylwardson with whom I saw him was his wife: it was only near the end of the voyage when the storm subsided and the invalids emerged that I discovered she was his brother's wife. The brother I did not remember seeing; and small wonder, for he disappeared before we were out of sight of land. From the passenger list I knew there was only one Mrs. Aylwardson on board, but the initials of the brothers' names did not then distinguish the two men for me; and, supposing that I understood the relationship at first, I never gave the matter another thought.

It was—for me, at any rate—a very natural mistake. Whether Dr. and Mrs. Nowles knew the situation from the start, I have never been able to find out. But at all events nothing was said by any one to undeceive me till the day before we landed, when Mr. Aylwardson himself made some reference to his wife's death five years earlier. Had I known the truth before, it might have complicated my own attitude. But placing Mr. Aylwardson in the same category with Dr. Nowles—among the safely married men whom I had always found to be most congenial acquaintances—I could be myself with him.

There is little more to tell. Mr. Aylwardson joined our party for the Cornwall and Devon coaching trip which, besides a week in London, was all that Dr. Nowles's holiday and mine allowed.

Years before (oppressed by the melancholy that is common among the thoughtful who have suffered early, who have struggled long alone) I had concluded that I was doomed forever to be baffled by my own intensity: that the future would be desolate like the past. To myself in the old days, I seemed to be always on my knees before a God who turned a deaf ear to my plea that I

would suffer any torture, would pay any price, for the boon, however brief, of happiness. I was like a helpless child who, despite the premonition of defeat, is compelled to keep on offering the greatest bribe he knows to the All-Powerful—a child entreating that a miracle of blessing may be wrought, yet entreating with hand upraised to ward off a blow.

With the failure of the trial marriage, I ceased entreating, sought no more what is not found by seeking. Instead, I endeavored to accept life as it was and make the best of it, believing that for me the book of love was closed.

But what I now caught glimpses of in the Cornwall ledges, in the lanes of Devonshire, opened to my view what I had never seen before: and it was so plain, so simple, there was no mistaking it. When happiness came I met it with a smile—a smile that held unswervingly through tears. My heart, always turbulent before, always questioning, was still: and in the stillness the answer of life's riddle was revealed.

Mr. Aylwardson and I were married in the fall, and he brought me to his home in a city far distant from New York. That was four years ago: my stepson has a brother now who is almost two years old. Home, child, comradeship—all that seemed unattainable—are mine: and anguish is no more remembered for the plenitude of joy. I thank God every day, and pray that other women's stories similar to mine may have an ending like my own.

(1)

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